

THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH  
DURING THE FIRST THREE CENTURIES

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## CHAPTER I

### BACKGROUNDS

Although the subject of this thesis will not permit a full and complete discussion of the status of women outside the Christian Church, nevertheless it is obviously necessary to include a preliminary statement concerning their position in ancient Greece, Rome, and Judaism. This will provide the necessary background for the ensuing discussion and will help to show at the very outset what effect, if any, the environment in which Christianity developed had on its message and practice; that is to say, more specifically, to what extent the status of women in Christianity was dependent upon or to what extent it differed from their status in Greek, Roman, and Jewish life.

#### I. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT GREECE

By comparison, Greek women were accorded somewhat higher respect than women of ancient pagan monarchies. Nevertheless, it is true that they were "placed almost on the same level with the slave,"<sup>1</sup> and were under the authority and control of their husbands both by custom and by law. Plato, of course, vigorously affirmed the equality of the sexes and the community of wives.<sup>2</sup> He speaks of "the natural partnership of

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (New York: Charles Scribner, 1860), I, 326.

<sup>2</sup> The Republic, V, V, 457-466.

the sexes"<sup>3</sup> and as a result of that belief holds that "women naturally share in all pursuits."<sup>4</sup> However, Plato's views were exceptional, and the truer representative of Greek thought about women was Aristotle who regarded the inferiority of women as inherent in the sex.<sup>5</sup> However, even Plato, in spite of his affirmations of equality, seemed to be tinged with the current idea of the inferiority of women when it comes to matters of love and sex. The love of The Symposium is homosexual love, and

. . . it is assumed without argument that this alone is capable of satisfying a man's highest and noblest aspirations, and the love of man and woman, when it is mentioned at all, is spoken of as altogether inferior, a purely physical impulse whose sole object is the procreation of children.<sup>6</sup>

The rise of the City-State was an important factor in affecting the status of women in Greece. Since the City-State was supreme, all individual wishes were subordinated to it. In Sparta, for instance, women were cultivated physically in order that they might function as good mothers and produce males who would be excellent warriors. However, this desire to benefit the State by providing it with warriors also worked to its detriment, because no thought was taken for women

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., V, V, 466.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., V, V, 455.

<sup>5</sup> Politics, I, V, 2.

<sup>6</sup> W. Hamilton, translator, The Symposium (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1951), p. 12.

after they had performed their function of motherhood. Freedom from responsibility in later years of their lives resulted in lax standards. The marriage tie was not binding and could be dissolved by the husband without any scruple, form or legal process.<sup>7</sup> The importance of breeding warriors for the State gave the women of Sparta full liberty to show themselves in public in the performance of bodily exercises. It is well to emphasize again that:

This liberty, however, was not a result of a philosophic idea of the equality of the two sexes, but was founded on the desire of producing strong children by means of strengthening the body of the female.<sup>8</sup>

In Athens, likewise, the State was all important. All the citizens of Athens were connected by blood ties of some sort, and they desired to maintain this relationship. Consequently careful distinction was made between citizens and strangers as well as between the offspring of each group. It followed from that that citizen women were forced to lead very secluded lives. Their existence is well described as follows:

The life of married women, maidens, children while in the care of women, and of female slaves, passed in the gynaikonites [the part of the house reserved for domestic purposes], from which they issued only on rare occasions. The family life of Greek women widely differed from our Christian idea; neither did it resemble the life in an Oriental harem, to which it was far superior. The

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<sup>7</sup> S. W. Fullom, The History of Woman (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1855), p. 165.

<sup>8</sup> E. Guhl and W. Koner, The Life of the Greeks and Romans (London: Chapman and Hall, 1875), p. 186.

idea of the family was held up by both law and custom, and although concubinage and the intercourse with *hetairai* was suffered, nay favoured, by the State, still such impure elements never intruded on domestic relations. Our following remarks refer, of course, only to the better classes, the struggle for existence by the poor being the same in all ages. In the seclusion of the *gynaikonites* the maiden grew up in comparative ignorance. The care bestowed on domestic duties and on her dress was the only interest of her monotonous existence. Intellectual intercourse with the other sex was wanting entirely. Even where maidens appeared in public at religious ceremonies, they acted separately from the youths. . . . Even marriage did not change this state of things. The maiden only passed from the *gynaikonites* of her father into that of her husband. In the latter, however, she was the absolute ruler, the *οικοδέσποινα* of her limited sphere. She did not share the intellectual life of her husband. . . . It is true that the husband watched over her honour with jealousy, assisted by *gynai-konomoi*, sometimes even by means of lock and key. . . . her position was only that of the mother of the family. Indeed, her duties and achievements were hardly considered, by the husband, in a much higher light than those of a faithful domestic slave.<sup>9</sup>

This seclusion did not necessarily mean that these wives were ignorant women, for many were self-trained in art and literature. In spite of this, however, and although the Greeks were a race of great thinkers, poets, sculptors, painters, and architects, "not one Athenian woman ever attained to the slightest distinction in any one department of literature, art, or science."<sup>10</sup> In speaking of women, Pericles, in the funeral oration which Thucydides puts into his mouth, says,

If I am to speak also of womanly virtues . . . I will sum up all in a brief admonition: Great is your glory if you fall not below the standard which nature has set for your sex, and great also is hers

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>10</sup> James Donaldson, *Woman: Her Position and Influence in Ancient Greece and Rome, and Among the Early Christians* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907), p. 55.

of whom there is least talk among men whether in praise or in blame.<sup>11</sup>

Futhermore, this seclusion did not mean inactivity, for the wife was in full charge of all domestic affairs of her household. She was absolute ruler in this realm, and in its own way it was a place of honor.<sup>12</sup>

The stranger women, called hetairai, did not, we may be sure, lead a monastic existence simply because they were forbidden to marry citizens. They naturally enjoyed much greater freedom than the wives of citizens did, and they became the companions, both intellectual and physical, of Athenian men. Demosthenes' summary of the status of these various classes of women is brutally frank: "Hetairai we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the ordinary requirements of the body, wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households."<sup>13</sup>

After the time of Alexander the Great, women began to have a relatively greater measure of freedom. This was especially true in Macedonia and was due doubtless largely to the fact that Macedonian dynasties produced an extraordinary succession of able and masterful women, such as Arsinoe, Berenice, and Cleopatra. These women played a large part in civic affairs, for they "received envoys . . . built temples,

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<sup>11</sup> Thucydides, II, XLV, 2.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Licht, Sexual Life in Ancient Greece (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1932), p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Demosthenes, Theomnestus and Apollodorus against Neaera, 122.



founded cities, engaged mercenaries, commanded armies, held fortresses, and acted on occasion as regents or co-rulers."<sup>14</sup> What is more important for this consideration is the fact that from the Macedonian courts relative freedom came to those women who desired emancipation. Women could be educated, take part in club life, appear at the games, for relations between the sexes were much less cramped. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that:

. . . most of these things clearly relate only to a minority. Freedom was not automatic, but had to be grasped; education for the mass was rudimentary, and even in the first century there were women, rich enough to own slaves, who could neither read nor write; Greece suffered from the sexes being on different levels of culture.<sup>15</sup>

Thus we may conclude that in the Greek world the status of women was decidedly inferior to that of men; the wives led lives of seclusion and practical slavery; the hetairai, though enjoying more freedom of movement at least, did not share the rights or status that belonged to men; the relative freedom which did come to women in places like Macedonia was only enjoyed by a minority.

## II. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT ROME

The status of women under the Roman empire was somewhat better than in Greece. According to law, the wife, however, was still regarded

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<sup>14</sup> W. W. Tarn, Hellenistic Civilization (London: Edward Arnold & Co., 1927), p. 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

merely as a piece of property with no rights and completely under the control of her husband. In practice, the law was very much relaxed, and women enjoyed considerable freedom. Furthermore, the wife was not kept in seclusion as in the Greek household; rather, "she shared her husband's life and set a standard of wifely and motherly virtues envied in a later age."<sup>16</sup>

Such freedom did not, of course, come all at once. The laws of the Republic made every father and husband a despot, and because some husbands chose to act their legally constituted role, there were two waves of feminine reaction which took the form of mass poisoning of husbands in 331 B. C. and 180 B. C.<sup>17</sup> In 215 B. C. a law, proposed by Oppius at a time when state finances were low and expenditures had to be curbed, provided

that no woman should be allowed to possess more than a half ounce of gold, to wear a parti-coloured garment, to ride in a chariot within the city of Rome or a town occupied by Roman citizens, or within a mile of these places, except for religious purposes.<sup>18</sup>

When more prosperous days returned Roman matrons who had been chafing under this law sought and won its repeal. It is one of the arguments against the repeal which is particularly relevant to this discussion:

If they win in this, what will they not attempt? Review all the

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<sup>16</sup> R. H. Barrow, The Romans (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1949), p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 89-92.

<sup>18</sup> Livy, XXXIV, I, 3.

laws with which your forefathers restrained their licence and made them subject to their husbands; even with all these bonds you can scarcely control them.<sup>19</sup>

These incidents show clearly both the restraint under which women lived (subject to their husbands) and the freedom which they enjoyed (being at liberty to appear in public). In contrast to Greek wives, Roman wives "walked and drove in the public thoroughfares with veils that did not conceal their faces, they dined in the company of men, they studied literature and philosophy. . . ."20

But with the emancipation and the enjoyment of more opportunities for women came moral laxity. Women sought escape from the control of their husbands by avoiding the use of the ancient forms of marriage which subjected them to it, but with the dropping of these solemn forms of marriage divorce became more common. Though we need not believe that Seneca's famous remark about divorce represented the condition of the majority of women, it nonetheless indicates the trend of the times. He asked (in 54 A. D. ):

Is there any woman that blushes at divorce now that certain illustrious and noble ladies reckon their years, not by the number of consuls, but by the number of their husbands, and leave home in order to marry, and marry in order to be divorced?<sup>21</sup>

Other vices also were common in Roman society at the time of Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., XXXIV, III, 1.

<sup>20</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., p. 154.

<sup>21</sup> Seneca, De Beneficiis, III, XVI, 2.

Another has summarized well the situation:

With rare exceptions, they [the Romans] copied only the vices of the Greeks. The old frugal, industrious, and virtuous manner of life practised by their ancestors was in too many instances exchanged for an idle, luxurious, and sensual existence. . . . Hand in hand with increasing wealth and outward prosperity came indolence and corruption, and the State whose citizens could boast that for five centuries no Roman had ever to divorce his wife, sank under the emperors to the pitch of moral degradation mirrored . . . in the opening chapter of Paul's epistle. The fountains of life were poisoned. Although the position of women in Rome was for long a much more dignified one than in Greece, there was latterly a greatly diminished value set on marriage, a marked increase in divorces, a general casting off of moral restraint. In the last pre-Christian century almost every vice was rampant--immorality and pederastia, abortion and infanticide, gluttony and avarice, cruelty and sycophancy, gambling and suicide, indecency in pictures, at public races, and on the stage.<sup>22</sup>

Religious movements had both good and bad effects on the status of women. Stoicism, first taught in Greece by Zeno and taken over in Roman times by the philosopher Seneca, the slave Epictetus, and the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, tended to elevate the position of women. It inculcated a lofty ethical standard which included a single standard of chastity for men and women alike.<sup>23</sup> On the other hand the worship of Bacchus which was practiced by many women included the practice of nameless vices and greatly degraded woman's position. In 181 B. C. the cult was declared illegal and the worst offenders in it were put to

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<sup>22</sup> William Fairweather, The Background of the Epistles (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1935), pp. 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gilbert Murray, Essays & Addresses (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1922), pp. 88-106, and Justin Martyr, Second Apology, 7.

death.<sup>24</sup>

The chief ingredient necessary in a true estimation of the status of women in ancient Rome is balance. It is difficult to avoid a one-sided exaggeration. The moral principles of Stoicism must be balanced with the knowledge that they were not widely applied; the evident degradation of society must be balanced with the realization that "among the common people throughout the empire there were doubtless many who had neither part nor lot in the ridiculous dainties or bestial practices of the wanton revellers pilloried in the literature of the age."<sup>25</sup> It is clear, nevertheless, that women enjoyed greater practical, if not legal, freedom in Roman than in Greek society and that this freedom brought about two results important in relation to the status of women under Christianity: (1) the laxity and licentiousness against which Christianity spoke and from which it protected its women, and (2) the freedom which resulted in the participation by women in religious activities which aided the spread of Christianity.<sup>26</sup> The most important relation by far between Christianity and the Roman way of life is a relation of contrast, and most agree that Christian teaching in relation to the status of women stood in sharp contrast to anything found in the heathen world. There are some, however, like Donaldson,

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<sup>24</sup> Livy, XXXIX, VIII.

<sup>25</sup> Fairweather, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Romans 16.

who say that the early teaching of Christianity, except for the teaching of Jesus Himself, actually contributed to the undoing of some of the progress that had been made up to that time in the Roman world.<sup>27</sup> Though this author disagrees with that position and would say that it fails to understand that the teachings of the New Testament and especially of St. Paul are set not in the context of human or heathen relations but rather in the context of relations in the supernaturally wrought Body of Christ, the full proof of this must await later discussion.

### III. THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN JUDAISM

At first glance woman's position in Judaism seems to be a paradox. On the one hand there is the well known saying of the synagogue service, "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a woman."<sup>28</sup> On the other hand there is the lofty conception of womanhood as reflected in the Proverbs:

Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. . . . Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children

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<sup>27</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., pp. 148-154.

<sup>28</sup> The Authorised Daily Prayer Book (London: Shapiro Vallentine and Co., 1947), p. 21.

arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.<sup>29</sup>

The paradox can be resolved only by a right understanding of woman's sphere of service. It is quite accurately stated in this summary statement:

According to Jewish ideas, the special and supreme sphere of woman is the home. There her position has always been one of unchallenged dignity. Public affairs and public activities lie outside the home--and therefore outside woman's special sphere.<sup>30</sup>

Even the prayer of the synagogue service quoted above does not actually contradict but rather supports this idea of a special sphere, for the very next prayer offered is offered by the women who say: "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast made me according to thy will."<sup>31</sup> J. H. Hertz's commentary on this prayer asserts that the true spirit of it is: "who has made me a woman, to win hearts for thee by motherly love or wifely devotion; and to lead souls to thee, by daughter's care or sisterly tenderness and loyalty."<sup>32</sup> These prayers, which were instituted after Ezra's revival, emphasize the distinction between the sexes and the special sphere of service of each.

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<sup>29</sup> Proverbs 21:10, 25-28.

<sup>30</sup> W. O. E. Oesterley and G. H. Box, The Religion and Worship of the Synagogue (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1907), pp. 297-98.

<sup>31</sup> The Authorised Daily Prayer Book, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Loc. cit.



Judaism shared the universal conception of the inferiority of women, but it, unlike Mohammedanism for instance, did not sanction the total subjection of women to men, but rather sought to elevate women in their proper sphere. In all the Semitic cults women enjoyed certain rights and privileges,<sup>33</sup> but in the Hebrew cult there was not the separation of the sexes so common among the others. Indeed, Hebrew women mixed more freely and often took a positive and influential part in both public and private affairs, and it is in these two categories that we shall consider the status of women in Judaism.

Her status in private life. In the private, family life in Israel are well evidenced both the distinction and dignity of women. Whatever be the correct etymology of  $\text{אִשָּׁה}$  (Gen. 2:23), it is quite evident that the members of each sex have a distinct place to fill in God's scheme of life, for "each has something to offer to the common stock of happiness that the other lacks."<sup>34</sup> Immediately there come to mind outstanding women in Jewish history, such as Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, Rachel, designated the "four mothers" by the Rabbis, as well as Manah's wife, Hannah, Ruth, Naomi, Esther, whose private lives played an important part in Israel's history.

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<sup>33</sup> Cf. W. F. Adeney, "Woman," A Dictionary of the Bible (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898), IV, 933-36, and Ismar J. Peritz, Woman in the Ancient Hebrew Cult (New York: Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1898), pp. 115-22.

<sup>34</sup> Morris Joseph, Judaism As Creed and Life (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1929), p. 408.



However, distinction and inferiority were recognized immediately after the birth of a female child, for the Jews required a double period of purification after the birth of a girl.<sup>35</sup> In the matter of education the Rabbis clearly disapproved of the same amount of instruction being given to girls as to boys. In particular, engaging in legal studies was not approved because the Rabbis

considered woman's mission and duties as lying in other directions, partly because the subjects were necessarily not always suitable for the other sex, partly because of the familiar intercourse between the sexes to which such occupations would have necessarily led, and finally--shall we say it?--because the Rabbis regarded woman's mind as not adapted for such investigations. The unkindest thing, perhaps, which they said on this score was, "Women are of a light mind;" though in its oft repetition the saying almost reads like a semi-jocular way of cutting short a subject on which discussion is disagreeable.<sup>36</sup>

However, this does not mean that the education of girls was entirely neglected. Children of the poor were educated in the time of Christ by contributions collected in the temple, and orphans, including female orphans, were the special charge of the whole congregation.<sup>37</sup> Attendance upon religious duties and at religious ceremonies further contributed to the education of girls, and that some gained a good religious education at least is evident from the accounts of such New Testament women as Lois, Eunice, and Priscilla. In general, however, it is quite

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<sup>35</sup> Leviticus 12:2, 5.

<sup>36</sup> Alfred Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1876), pp. 132-33.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

true that "there was little recognition of the mental and spiritual capacities of women."<sup>38</sup>

Subordination and dignity of the position of the Jewish woman is further demonstrated in matters pertaining to marriage. Subordination is seen in questions involving her legal rights, and dignity is evinced by her position and activity in the home. Legally, the position of the Jewish woman was very low. One writer declares that "it would be misleading to apply the term 'free-woman' to any Israelitess, except perhaps to a widow."<sup>39</sup> Female slaves were, of course, at the complete disposal of their masters. The concubine's position was slightly better because certain restrictions were imposed on one who had a concubine. If he no longer desired her, he could not simply dismiss her but either had to maintain her, let her go free, or permit her relatives to redeem her.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, in reality it is true that the Jewish woman has "always occupied a more dignified position than her legal status would seem to suggest."<sup>41</sup> Though polygamy was permitted in Israel, there is no doubt that the monogamy of the patriarchs is held up as the example

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<sup>38</sup> T. B. Allworthy, Women in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1917), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> W. H. Bennett, "Family," A Dictionary of the Bible, I, 847.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Exodus 21:7-11.

<sup>41</sup> Oesterley and Box, op. cit., p. 291.

to be followed. Certainly the description of the virtuous woman in the Proverbs presupposes monogamy, for that woman is pictured "as occupying a position of dignity which would be incompatible if rival wives were in evidence."<sup>42</sup> However, the right of divorce was at the discretion of the husband though the wife could expect to receive a bill of divorce-ment.<sup>43</sup> In the days of Malachi divorce seemed to be a frequent thing,<sup>44</sup> but at the time of Jesus it may have been less frequent since it came to be required in the first century B. C. that the dowry had to be returned if the wife was divorced.<sup>45</sup> How all of this affected the status of women will be discussed in detail in the consideration of Jesus' teaching concerning divorce. It does not follow, however, that, because divorce was at the husband's discretion and fairly frequent, Christianity inherited from Judaism only a morally lax and legally rigid standard in these matters. There were many faithful women who "must have kept the moral atmosphere pure and sweet, and shed precious

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<sup>42</sup> G. H. Box, Judaism in the Greek Period (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1932), p. 135.

<sup>43</sup> Deuteronomy 24:1; Isaiah 50:1, Jeremiah 3:8.

<sup>44</sup> Malachi 2:16.

<sup>45</sup> George Foot Moore, Judaism (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1927), II, 123.

light on their homes and on society, corrupt to the core as it was under the sway of heathenism."<sup>46</sup>

In the life of the home the Jewish woman's position was one of dignity and responsibility. She was her husband's conscience, and there was no more exalted task for her than that of "deepening all his better instincts, of encouraging all his holy impulses."<sup>47</sup> In the case of the ruler of the synagogue, it was thought that he should be married, especially if he offered up prayer in the congregation because his wife would preserve him from sin.<sup>48</sup> Further responsibilities for the wife appear in her relation to her children. Everywhere in the stories of the Old Testament is the purpose of marriage the procreation of children. This was considered the greatest honor because it was God's will,<sup>49</sup> and it was given added prominence because of the expectation that some Hebrew woman would bear the Messiah. It seems also to have been the general practice that women should name the children. Out of forty-four cases in which the naming of children is mentioned in the Old Testament, in twenty-six it is ascribed to women, in fourteen

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<sup>46</sup> Edersheim, op. cit., p. 159.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph, op. cit., p. 409.

<sup>48</sup> Joshua L. Bernard, The Synagogue and the Church (London: B. Fellows, 1842), p. 143.

<sup>49</sup> D. Wilhelm Bousset, Die Religion des Judentums in Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter (Berlin: Verlag von Reuther und Reichard, 1906), p. 491.

to men, and in four to God.<sup>50</sup> As the children grew older it became the woman's holy vocation to assist in their training. Surely the first teaching

. . . would necessarily devolve on the mother. It needed not the extravagant laudations, nor the promises held out by the Rabbis, to incite Jewish women to this duty. If they were true to their descent, it would come almost naturally to them.<sup>51</sup>

Where polygamy was practiced the mother of each sub-family would assume greater importance. Normally, the teaching and training by the mother is joined in a coordinate relationship with that of the father, and equal reverence to both parents was expected from the children.<sup>52</sup> In this matter at least, a Jewish mother fulfilling her responsibilities in the sphere of her home receives equal honor with the faithful father. Indicative of the mother's influence in the lives of her children is the attention given to the naming of the mothers of the kings of Judah in the Old Testament accounts.<sup>53</sup> The mother of Zebedee's children, the mother of John Mark, women like Lois and Eunice bear further testimony to the importance of the mother's role of great educator. It is well said that "Judaism has ever sought to hallow the home, to make

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<sup>50</sup> Peritz, op. cit., pp. 130-31.

<sup>51</sup> Alfred Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), I, 229.

<sup>52</sup> Exodus 20:12; 21:15, 17; Leviticus 19:3; Deuteronomy 5:16; Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; 20:20; 23:22; 28:24; 30:11, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. 1 Kings 11:26; 14:21, 31; 15:2, 10; 22:42.

it a shrine at which the parents minister to the congregation of the children."<sup>54</sup> In this respect Christianity has drawn in large measure on its heritage in Judaism. Subordination, subjection, dignity, and responsibility describe correctly the various aspects of the private life of an Hebrew woman, and in the sphere of the home her place was beyond question a prominent one.

Her status in public life. For the Jewish woman public life is practically synonymous with religious life, and in this her role was far from passive though it was certainly not one of leadership. Obviously "the religious feeling that is the common possession of Jewish as well as of other women was bound to assert itself; and it did so from time to time in various ways."<sup>55</sup>

Absolutely basic to this consideration is the fact that "all the people,"<sup>56</sup> which included women, were part of the covenant relation which God introduced through Moses to the children of Israel. That women were distinctly a part of this covenant relationship was made clear by the special protecting commandments given concerning them.<sup>57</sup> Very

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<sup>54</sup> Joseph, op. cit., p. 413.

<sup>55</sup> Oesterley and Box, op. cit., p. 298.

<sup>56</sup> Exodus 19:11.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Exodus 22:22-24 and Deuteronomy 22:13-30.

few notice this point, but one, at least, correctly observes:

That which distinguishes the God of Israel from the gods of the nations is, among other traits, his condescension to the humble; he deigns to establish his covenant with the children, the women and the slaves.<sup>58</sup>

In whatever proportion one allows Judaism to be a supernaturally given religious revelation from God, in that proportion this point becomes important, for it gives women a standing before God which they did not have in heathen religious relationships. Even if no supernatural element is allowed, this factor still remains the basic feature in the consideration of their status in religious life.

Though the status was thus, the practice was different, for "the majority of women were entirely dependent on man, and became in religious matters a sort of appendix to their husbands, who by their good actions insured salvation also for them."<sup>59</sup> Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence of distinct religious activity on the part of women to form accurate conclusions as to the use some made of their privileges.

The law made provision for the presence of women at the sanctuary at the festal seasons, for daughters and maidservants were to join with sons and manservants.<sup>60</sup> Women were present at the reading of the

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<sup>58</sup> H. Leclercq, "Femme," Dictionnaire D'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie (Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ane, 1922), p. 1301.

<sup>59</sup> S. Schechter, Studies in Judaism (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1896), I, 388.

<sup>60</sup> Deuteronomy 12:12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14.

Law in the time of Nehemiah. Likewise, women were present at David's feast which he made in honor of recovering the ark,<sup>61</sup> and the daughters of Shiloh could be counted on to be present at the annual feast.<sup>62</sup> Hannah and Peninnah, who were accustomed to go to the yearly religious gathering in Shiloh are examples of women who participated in public prayer.<sup>63</sup>

It is also clear that women could take part in the ancient sacrifices. The fact that they were forbidden to eat the flesh of the sin-offering indicates that they were permitted to share in other offerings,<sup>64</sup> and there is no question that they offered sacrifices for purification.<sup>65</sup> Women, as well as men, were permitted to separate themselves unto Jehovah by vowing the vow of a Nazarite.<sup>66</sup> Theophanies were not limited to men, for there are stories of God or the messenger

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<sup>61</sup> 1 Samuel 6:19.

<sup>62</sup> Judges 21:6-25.

<sup>63</sup> 1 Samuel 1:1 ff.; 2:19 ff.

<sup>64</sup> Leviticus 6:29; 10:14.

<sup>65</sup> Leviticus 12; 15:19-33; Judges 13:20; Nehemiah 12:43.

<sup>66</sup> Numbers 6:2.



of God appearing to Eve,<sup>67</sup> Hagar,<sup>68</sup> Sarah,<sup>69</sup> and Samson's mother.<sup>70</sup> The rites of mourning were performed by men and women for men and women alike.<sup>71</sup> Although a woman prophet was the exceptional thing, several outstanding ones made their appearance in Israel. Miriam, who is called a prophetess,<sup>72</sup> was set on the same eminence as her brothers, Moses and Aaron. Deborah was a prophetess as well as a judge,<sup>73</sup> and Huldah the prophetess was an authority in the days of Josiah whom the king and the high-priest could consult in a matter of spiritual interpretation.<sup>74</sup> Mention is also made of the prophetess in Isaiah,<sup>75</sup> and

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<sup>67</sup> Genesis 3:13 ff.

<sup>68</sup> Genesis 16:8 ff.; 21:17 ff.

<sup>69</sup> Genesis 18:9, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Judges 13:3 ff.

<sup>71</sup> Judges 11:40; 2 Chronicles 35:25; Jeremiah 16:7.

<sup>72</sup> Exodus 15:20; Numbers 12:2; Micah 6:4.

<sup>73</sup> Judges 4:4.

<sup>74</sup> 2 Kings 22:13-20.

<sup>75</sup> Isaiah 8:3.

the prophetess Noadiah in the days of Nehemiah.<sup>76</sup> The aged Anna who was present at Jesus' circumcision was also a prophetess.<sup>77</sup>

In several of these instances the gifts of the prophetesses were manifested in the utterance of inspired songs. For more ordinary purposes singing women, as well as men, were attached to the temple and helped form a temple choir.<sup>78</sup> Ewald thinks, on the basis of Psalm 68:24-25, that these women also lived at the temple, but whether or not this is correct, it is true that "proper sacerdotal functions, whether higher or lower, cannot be ascribed to them."<sup>79</sup> It is also said that women danced on occasions of great victory.<sup>80</sup>

The earliest allusion to women's participation in public worship is that of the serving women at the door of the tent of meeting.<sup>81</sup>  $\eta \chi \lambda \varsigma$  suggests a sort of guard of honor around the sanctuary, but actually "it is impossible to say what the work of these women had been."<sup>82</sup> In the days of the synagogue when anyone who seemed likely to

<sup>76</sup> Nehemiah 6:14.

<sup>77</sup> Luke 2:36.

<sup>78</sup> Ezra 2:65; Nehemiah 7:67.

<sup>79</sup> Heinrich Ewald, The History of Israel (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1878), p. 285.

<sup>80</sup> Exodus 15:20; Judges 11:34; 1 Samuel 18:6; Psalm 68:25.

<sup>81</sup> Exodus 38:8.

<sup>82</sup> Adeney, loc. cit.

have anything to contribute to the edification of the congregation might expect to be invited to speak, there is no record of any woman addressing the synagogue.<sup>83</sup> However, titles of honor were conferred on women, such as "Mistress of the Synagogue," "Mother of the Synagogue," and even "Ruler of the Synagogue." Although the office was not common until later, it is not unlikely that the title was bestowed at the time of Christ. Even the office conveyed with it no duties of a quasi-ministerial or liturgical kind, and the bestowing of the title does not indicate that women held the office. It was simply a title of honor given for "meritorious work connected with a religious institution, viz., Charity,"<sup>84</sup> or because of the woman's "rank in the community" and "social weight."<sup>85</sup>

Thus to say that the role of Jewish women in the public religious life of Israel was solely a passive one would not be accurate. They had certain religious privileges within the covenant which heathen women did not enjoy. Many religious activities were open to them, and

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Luke 4:16, 20; Acts 13:14 ff.

<sup>84</sup> Schechter, op. cit., I, 386-87.

<sup>85</sup> Solomon Reinach, "Inscription Grecque de Smyrne. La Jiuve Rufina," Revue des Études Juives (Paris: A la Librairie A. Durlacher), VII, 165. Further references to the ἀρχισυνάγωγος will be found in Emil Schurer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1885), II, 63-65; and Vitringa, De Synagoga Vetere (Granequæ: Johannis Gyzelaar, 1696), pp. 580-92, 695-711; and W. M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), p. 480n.

some participated in them in an outstanding way. Nevertheless, certain activities were forbidden to women. One could not conclude that there was universal participation in those activities open to them. Certainly they exercised no place of leadership as a general practice. Men dominated the public scene in Israel.

The chief importance of Jewish women is to be seen in their service in the home. Though their legal rights were practically nonexistent, still there was a place of honor accorded to faithful mothers in Israel. The general principle, then, which applied to the status of women in Judaism was: "The King's daughter within the palace is all glorious (Psalm xlv. 14), but not outside of it."<sup>86</sup>

Certainly it is evident even from this sketch that the teachings of Christianity in the New Testament with regard to women bear many similarities to those of Judaism as reflected in the Old Testament. The Christian practice stands in contrast to that of the Greeks and Romans, and it builds upon that of Judaism. All of this will be clarified by the investigation of the status of women in Christianity. The purpose of this chapter, to sketch the situation into which the Gospel came, has been fulfilled.

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<sup>86</sup> Schechter, op. cit., I, 391.

PART I

THE EFFECT OF THE LIFE OF JESUS  
ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

## CHAPTER II

### THE MOTHER OF OUR LORD

A study of the effect of the life and ministry of Jesus on the status of women as revealed in the Gospel narratives should begin with a section devoted to Mary the mother of our Lord, for without doubt "the Virgin Mary marks the turning-point in the history of the female sex."<sup>1</sup> However, a necessary prerequisite to this study, as well as to all that of Part I, is to arrive at some conclusion which will serve as a satisfactory working basis concerning the narratives themselves.

Recovering from the spirit of nineteenth-century liberalism which attempted to strip the Gospel stories of "later theological accretions and legends," recent scholarship is recognizing the fact that "all proper historical writing is a record of interpreted facts."<sup>2</sup> The great question, however, is, Have the facts been interpreted by the Evangelists rightly or wrongly? What is fact and what is faith? Hunter, summarizing the answer of scholars in the past fifty years, declares:

To this question we may reply that it is on all counts more probable that the faith arose out of the facts than that the faith

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<sup>1</sup> Schaff, op. cit., I, 110. He goes on to say, however, that "in her . . . the curse, which had hung over the era of the fall, was removed, and her whole sex was blessed." This is dangerously over-eloquent, for it seems not to be far removed from the idea of Immaculate Conception and is certainly contrary to the thought of the early Church as reflected in 1 Timothy 2:11-15.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. Hunter, Interpreting the New Testament 1900-1950 (London: S C M Press, 1951), p. 47.

created them. But we may go farther. We may point, first of all, to the whole atmosphere and setting of the Gospel Story. So far as we can judge, it is primitive and Palestinian: it reflects the religious and social conditions of first-century Palestine. This is some guarantee of its reliability. A second weighty consideration in its favour is that the Gospel record (and indeed the whole New Testament) is built upon the apostolic kerygma, i.e. a summary of tradition about Jesus which, in such passages as I Cor. 15. 3ff., we can trace back to within a few years of the Crucifixion.<sup>3</sup>

Vincent Taylor is willing to put himself on record as believing that about half the contents of Mark may be traced to Mark himself,

with the proviso that many of the narratives in question are not recorded precisely as they were first related, but reflect in varying degrees the apologetic, liturgical, catechetical, and doctrinal interests of the primitive communities and of Mark himself.<sup>4</sup>

But, it must be remembered, even behind these changes made by "editors" with special tastes or convictions "is a large mass of reasonably reliable material going back in essentials to eyewitnesses in the case of the narrative, and to Jesus Himself in the case of teaching."<sup>5</sup> Although symbolism and allegory are recognized in the Fourth Gospel, the historical worth of the narratives and discourses in that Gospel is finding more and more favor. At least it is more generally recognized

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8.

<sup>4</sup> Vincent Taylor, "Mark's Use of Gospel Tradition," Bulletin III Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (Oxford: Oxonian Press, 1952), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> T. W. Manson, "Is It Possible to Write a Life of Christ?" The Expository Times (Vol. LIII, No. 8, May 1942), p. 249.

now that whatever be the deeper meaning of an incident, the author was building on what he believed to be history.<sup>6</sup>

In using in this section, then, the records of the Gospels, one does not assume their literal historicity nor necessarily imply it by their use. But they are used for the sake of the historical core of truth which they evidently reflect. Certainly one can agree with Burkitt, who says concerning the women of the Gospels:

Some of these personages are certainly historical, of others we may not be so sure. But their presence corresponds to what is certainly a fact of history, to wit, the appeal made by the earliest Christian preaching to women, and their response.<sup>7</sup>

One may add that since in the case of the accounts about women there is no evident theological reason for an editor inserting female persons into the record, in all likelihood the appearance of women has historical basis. If this be so, then the relating of these incidents in this thesis is not without point, and this will be the working basis.

## I. EVENTS RELATED TO THE BIRTH OF JESUS

To every pious Jewish woman the hope that she might be the mother of Messiah was a very real one. In Mary that hope was realized, and for that reason "the relation of the Virgin Mary to the Gospel

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hunter, op. cit., pp. 89-91.

<sup>7</sup> F. Crawford Burkitt, The Gospel History and its Transmission (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), pp. 215-16.



dispensation and to the divine Saviour is exceptional."<sup>8</sup> Two evangelists, Matthew and Luke, give a record of the genealogy of our Lord, Matthew prefacing his to the account of the beginning of Christ's life, and Luke his to the account of the beginning of His ministry.<sup>9</sup> It is at once apparent that there are differences in the two genealogies which involve a number of problems, the resolving of which is not easy.

The difference between the two genealogies was from very early times felt to be a difficulty . . . and it is probable that so obvious a solution, as that one was the pedigree of Joseph and the other the pedigree of Mary, would have been very soon advocated, if there had been any reason (excepting the difficulty) for adopting it. But this solution is not suggested by anyone until Annianus of Viterbo propounded it, c. A. D. 1490. . . . If we were in possession of all the facts, we might find that both pedigrees are in accordance with them.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of these difficulties, certain facts relevant to our purpose are clear. In these genealogies are seen the principles of subordination and exaltation of women. Subordination is observed in Mary's legal position in the genealogies. Matthew's intention in including the genealogy seems to be

. . . to show that in Jesus, as the heir of David and of Abraham, were fulfilled the promises made to them: the pedigree itself is

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<sup>8</sup> Henry Wheeler, Deaconesses Ancient and Modern (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1889), p. 21.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 103.

intended to illustrate this, rather than to prove it, and it is not easy to avoid the conclusion that it is quite artificial. . . .<sup>11</sup>

However, in order to demonstrate Jesus' right as heir of David and of Abraham, Matthew has to lay stress on Joseph's being the husband of Mary that he may show that "as he [Joseph] recognized his wife's son in a legal sense his own, Jesus was legally the heir of David."<sup>12</sup> Luke, of course, entirely omits Mary's name, and while he is careful to avoid the impression that Jesus might be the natural son of Joseph, he nonetheless disallows the possibility of slighting Jesus' kingly claims by avoiding linking Him solely to His mother.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the subordination of women is again evident in Mary's having to be linked with the name of a man in order to give legal status to her Son.

On the other hand, a singular exaltation of women is seen in Matthew's genealogy in the mention of the names of four women.<sup>14</sup> In a

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<sup>11</sup> P. M. Bernard, "Genealogies of Jesus Christ," A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), I, 637.

<sup>12</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>13</sup> This is true no matter whether one understands the genealogy to be that of Joseph or of Mary; if the former, Jesus is linked to Joseph and the case is the same as in Matthew; if the latter, Jesus is linked to His grandfather Heli through Mary to be sure, but without mentioning her name, for the Jews said, "Genus matris non vocatur genus" (Baba bathra, 110a). Roman Catholics generally hold the latter view (cf. A. J. Maas, "Virgin Mary," The Catholic Encyclopedia (London: The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1912), XV, 464E. For a Protestant who holds this view, cf. F. Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), I, 195-204.

<sup>14</sup> Tamar, 1:3; Rahab and Ruth, 1:5; Bathsheba, 1:6.

list that is selective, as Matthew's is, this becomes especially significant, for complementing what has been said above, it shows God's acceptance of woman's person, His forgiveness extended to them, and His receiving of them into the very line of the Messiah. Bernard summarizes well:

The God about whom Jesus taught had shown Himself ready, in the history of the royal family, to accept strangers and sinners. In the case of Ruth this is fully satisfactory; and the conduct of the other three women is represented in Scripture as justified or pardoned. . . . Probably the thought uppermost in the mind of the compiler would be God's acceptance of these women, and not their sin.<sup>15</sup>

One thing is to be noted in the story of the annunciation; namely, the angel's proclamation that Mary was "highly favoured."<sup>16</sup> The verb χαριτόω is found elsewhere in the New Testament only in Ephesians 1:6, and from this latter passage "and the analogy of verbs ending in -όω, κεχαριτωμένη must mean 'endued with grace.'<sup>17</sup> Although great grace was bestowed upon Mary, it evidently was no greater grace than that which is bestowed on every believer today whether male or female.

According to the story of Mary's visit to her kinswoman Elisabeth, she was greeted with the words, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard, op. cit., I, 638.

<sup>16</sup> Luke 1:28.

<sup>17</sup> Plummer, op. cit., p. 22.

the mother of my Lord should come to me?"<sup>18</sup> Lest too much be made of these words, Edersheim's remark is appropriate: "the words which, filled with the Holy Ghost, she spake, were the mother's utterance, to the mother, of the homage which her unborn babe offered to his Lord. . . ."<sup>19</sup> When Mary returned to Nazareth, Joseph, finding her with child was minded to put her away privily.<sup>20</sup> Although Joseph was only "espoused" to Mary, this was perfectly in order, for "from the moment of her betrothal a woman was treated as if she were actually married. The union could not be dissolved, except by regular divorce; breach of faithfulness was regarded as adultery."<sup>21</sup> Making a public example of her "alludes to the law of the woman suspected of adultery set forth in the Book of Numbers V, 11-31."<sup>22</sup> Joseph's dilemma was solved by the appearance to him of "an angel."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Luke 1:42-43.

<sup>19</sup> Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, I, 153. The εὐλογημένη σύ ἐν γυναιξίν in some manuscripts of verse 28 is probably an interpolation from this passage. Though attested by A, C, D, it is omitted by X and B.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew 1:19.

<sup>21</sup> Edersheim, Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ, p. 148.

<sup>22</sup> David Werner Amram, The Jewish Law of Divorce (London: David Nutt, 1897), p. 35n.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 1:20.

All of these stories show two things: in many respects Mary is not an exceptional case since she lived under Jewish customs regarding women in her day; and yet she is exceptional by virtue of her relationship to Jesus, and in this singularity she is the turning point in the history of women by being a sort of firstfruits of that which the teachings of Jesus did for women. However, this further observation must be made: not only is her blessedness related to her Son, it is also related to Motherhood. It is as obvious a truth as saying that no man could have been the mother of Jesus, and yet it is so obvious that it is often overlooked. She is not only the Mother of our Lord; she is also the Mother of our Lord. The Mother could only be a woman; yet the Incarnation was in a man.

## II. MARY'S PUBLIC ENCOUNTERS WITH JESUS

There are four stories in the life of Jesus which break through the relatively general silence which surrounds His relationships with His mother. The first concerns a visit to Jerusalem at Passover when Jesus was twelve.<sup>24</sup> According to the story, Jesus, having been missed on the return journey and having been found in the temple, replies to Mary's questioning with the statement that His actions were motivated by the necessity of being about His father's business. This strange and unexpected reply told Mary plainly that in connection with the work

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<sup>24</sup> Luke 2:41-52.

which His father had given Him to do there must be no interference from her. And yet the Gospel writer adds that Jesus was subject to Joseph and Mary. Here is an illustration in the life of Jesus of the later Pauline principle that obedience "in the Lord" is expected of children toward their parents.<sup>25</sup> As mothers, women are expected to fill a place of authority and leadership in relation to their children, but that must never be to the compromising of the spiritual responsibilities of those children.

The story of the marriage in Cana of Galilee illustrates the same principle.<sup>26</sup> Here Mary appears without Joseph; indeed, this and "all the later notices of the Lord's Mother . . . confirm the supposition that he [Joseph] died before the Ministry began."<sup>27</sup> When the wine ran out, Mary appealed to Jesus for help, and Jesus replied: "Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι; οὕτω ἔκει ἡ ὥρα μου." There is no doubt that γύναι is an address of respect,<sup>28</sup> but τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί wherever used "marks some divergence between the thoughts and ways of the persons so

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<sup>25</sup> Ephesians 6:1.

<sup>26</sup> John 2:1-12.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Barclay Swete, The Gospel According to St Mark (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913), p. 112. Swete adds, "The Arabic Historia Josephi (cc. 14, 15) places his death in our Lord's eighteenth year, when Joseph had reached the age of 111."

<sup>28</sup> Cf. John 4:21; 20:13, 15; 19:26; Homer, Iliad, III, 204; Xenophon, Cyropaedia, V, 1, 6.

brought together.<sup>29</sup> In this passage it

serves to show that the actions of the Son of God, now that He has entered on His divine work, are no longer dependent in any way on the suggestion of a woman, even though that woman be His Mother. . . The time of silent discipline and obedience . . . was over.<sup>30</sup>

Anxiety may have prompted the incident which formed the third story of Mary's public encounters with Jesus.<sup>31</sup> Whatever be the motive, Mary is said to have sought Jesus amid a crowd of people to whom He was ministering. When told that His mother and brothers were asking for Him, Jesus replied: "Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother." Swete summarizes well the significance of this saying:

This relative renunciation of kinship appears at the outset of the Ministry (Jo. ii. 4) and continues to the end (Jo. xix. 26), and a similar attitude is urged upon the disciples (Mc. x. 29). But it is a relative attitude only (Mt. x. 37), and is perfectly consistent with tender care for kinsmen, as the saying on the Cross shews. . . . The bond which unites the family of God is obedience to the Divine Will.<sup>32</sup>

Again the incident illustrates the principle that supernatural relations transcend natural ones.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, The Gospel According to St. John (London: John Murray, 1908), I, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Mark 3:31-35; Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21.

<sup>32</sup> Swete, op. cit., pp. 69-71.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. the incident mentioned in Luke 11:27-28.



Nevertheless, as Swete indicated, natural relationships and responsibilities are not obliterated, and the fourth story illustrates this principle. In addition, it is an illustration of instructions which were later given to Timothy concerning family obligations.<sup>34</sup> The story concerns the incident at the Cross where Mary is committed into John's keeping.<sup>35</sup> It is rightly said of the incident:

The Oriental, even the Jewish, mother would have been prostrate, with dishevelled hair and garments; Mary is found 'standing' (Jn 19:25). There is no mention of words, not even of tears. Silently and quietly at the direction of her Son she leaves the cross, though we know that a sword was at the time piercing her through and through.<sup>36</sup>

As far as the Gospel narratives are concerned, there are no other recorded encounters of Mary with Jesus. It should be noted that there is one expected encounter missing in the records; i. e., a resurrection appearance to Mary. Although the Roman Catholic contention could be true; i. e., that "it is not improbable that Jesus visited His Blessed Mother repeatedly during the forty days after His resurrection,"<sup>37</sup> still there is nothing but silence in the records. However significant that may be in other regards, it is not important to this

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<sup>34</sup> 1 Timothy 5:4, 8.

<sup>35</sup> John 19:26-27.

<sup>36</sup> G. H. S. Walpole, "Woman," A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels, II, 835.

<sup>37</sup> Maas, op. cit., XV, 469.



thesis, for our Lord is said to have appeared to women after His resurrection, the significance of which will be discussed below.

### III. MARY'S POSITION AND SIGNIFICANCE

It is necessary to summarize that which has been said about Mary and to justify why so much space should be devoted to this consideration. The incidents which concern her introduce and illustrate a number of themes which are further developed throughout the New Testament. The inclusion of women in the genealogy of our Lord as a sign of God's favor; the emphasis on the blessing of Motherhood; the responsibility of a mother in the training of her child; the further, and often more difficult, responsibility of not standing in the way of that child's spiritual obligations and calling; the duty of children to their parents--themes which appear elsewhere in the New Testament--are all illustrated by Mary's own position in the Gospels. It is evident that most of these themes are related to the home, which leads one to the conclusion that Mary's position becomes significant as a model of ideal Christian womanhood. It is obvious in this discussion that even if one should consider every detail in these stories to be historically true, there is a dearth of material concerning Mary in the canonical books. Though this has been implied to be "a deliberate design on the part of the evangelists to reduce the mother to relative insignificance in the

presence of her Divine Son,"<sup>38</sup> one feels that the truer explanation is that:

. . . this slightness of texture is itself a note of genuine portraiture; for the reason that Mary was of a retiring nature, unobtrusive, reticent, perhaps even shrinking from observation, so that the impress of her personality was confined to the sweet sanctities of the home circle.<sup>39</sup>

Thus one may say with Walpole that

. . . we have given much time to the study of the Virgin Mother because she was the only woman really educated by Christ, in the sense that St. John and St. Peter were, and we see in the little that is told of her what a true woman ought to be.<sup>40</sup>

Finally, a word must be said about Mary's position and significance in the early Church. The only other reference to Mary in the New Testament occurs in the listing of her with those who were gathered in the upper room before Pentecost.<sup>41</sup> After this her name disappears from the record, and in this instance

she is not referred to as a source of information, still less a fount of authority, though she could have told more than any living being about the birth of the Saviour, and the thirty long years of His humble obscurity.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Walter F. Adeney, Women of the New Testament (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1901), p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> James Hastings, editor, The Greater Men and Women of the Bible (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915), V, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Walpole, op. cit., II, 835.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 1:14; but cf. Galatians 4:4 and Revelation 12:1-6.

<sup>42</sup> The Greater Men and Women of the Bible, V, 17.

But, though present with the disciples, there is certainly no indication that she took any place of leadership.

Even if Mary was not a source of information in this public way to the Church, she may have been privately. Although it is ridiculous to say that "the Four Gospels would be absolutely valueless as a record of the Life of Jesus, were it not for the most valuable information given by her [Mary] and by her only . . ."43, Ramsay may not be far from the truth in suggesting that Mary or someone very close to her supplied Luke with facts for his gospel. Whoever the intermediary was, he suggests that "if one existed, [it] is more likely to have been a woman than a man. There is a womanly spirit in the whole narrative, which seems inconsistent with the transmission from man to man. . . ."44 If this be true, then Mary's contribution, though made privately, to the life of the early church is large.

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43 Christianus, The Theological Influence of the Blessed Virgin on the Apostolic School (London: Frederic Norgate, 1888), p. 9.

44 W. M. Ramsay, Was Christ Born at Bethlehem? (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1898), p. 88.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ATTITUDE OF JESUS TOWARD WOMEN

"The relation of Christ to woman is one of the most interesting and one of the most difficult topics in the Gospels."<sup>1</sup> The variety of opinions and conclusions relative to this subject bear ample testimony to the truth of this statement. On the one hand, Robinson warns us that the naturalness of the gospel accounts of women and Christ "is apt to deceive us into thinking that it was a very ordinary thing,"<sup>2</sup> while Lightfoot comments on that large place given to women in the records that "to contemporaries it must have appeared in the light of a social revolution."<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Donaldson is as emphatic in stating that:

. . . an examination of the facts seems to me to show that there was no sign of this revolution in the first three centuries of the Christian era, and that the position of women among Christians was lower, and the notions in regard to them were more degraded than they were in the first.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously the task before one is not easy, particularly that of drawing proper conclusions.

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<sup>1</sup> Walpole, op. cit., II, 834.

<sup>2</sup> William Robinson, "The Reconciliation of the Sexes," The Expository Times, LVII, No. 3 (December, 1945), 59.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Sermons Preached on Special Occasions (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), p. 224.

<sup>4</sup> Donaldson, op. cit., p. 148.

Broadly speaking, the Gospels picture our Lord as having an attitude of appreciating the distinct capabilities of women as personalities in their own right. Allworthy has well said that each individual gospel writer records

the powerful impression produced upon women by the personality and teaching of Jesus. This impression could only have been made by one who had a sincere belief in the intellectual and spiritual possibilities of women.<sup>5</sup>

To substantiate and elaborate this statement is the task of this chapter.

#### I. APPRECIATION OF WOMAN'S SPIRITUAL CAPABILITY

The Gospel counterpart to the Pauline statement that in Christ there is neither male nor female<sup>6</sup> is the saying of Jesus, that "whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and mother" (Mark 3:35; Matt. 12:50; Luke 8:21). Thus early in His ministry Jesus opened to all the doors to intimate affinity with Himself, and "sex constituted no barrier to this intimacy."<sup>7</sup> This was a new idea in the nature of a revolution, for "the story . . . has no

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<sup>5</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>7</sup> Allworthy, loc. cit.

Rabbinic ring."<sup>8</sup> In the same vein, our Lord also said that His claims might set "The mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law."<sup>9</sup> Though one must be careful not to read into this verse feminine equality with or superiority over men, still it surely can be safely said that it indicates that "women might take an independent line in religion."<sup>10</sup>

There are two stories in the gospels of Jesus' recognizing, honoring, and rewarding a woman's faith with healing. The one concerns a Jewish woman whose faith (though it may have been mixed with the superstition that Christ's garments could heal apart from His will) made her free from an issue of blood that had plagued her.<sup>11</sup> The other story involved a Gentile woman; and, although this Syrophenician was reminded by Jesus "of the exclusiveness of the Jews in relation to Gentiles,"<sup>12</sup> and although she was refused "with great and offending sharpness: the

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<sup>8</sup> C. G. Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), p. 249.

<sup>9</sup> Luke 12:53.

<sup>10</sup> Allworthy, loc. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Mark 5:25-34; Matthew 9:20-22; Luke 8:43-44.

<sup>12</sup> W. C. Allen, The Gospel According to Saint Mark (London: Rivingtons, 1915, ICC), p. 109.

word kunaria is in the oriental world, even to-day, an insult,"<sup>13</sup> her persistent faith was rewarded with the deliverance of her daughter from an unclean spirit.<sup>14</sup> These two incidents not only illustrate the spiritual capability of women but also indicate an appreciation of women on the part of Jesus which obliterated the barriers of sex and race.

## II. APPRECIATION OF WOMAN'S INTELLECTUAL CAPABILITY

The unwillingness of the Rabbis to teach Jewish women has already been mentioned. Education, except for that which could be given the girls at home, was for men only. But in the ministry of Jesus there is abundant evidence that He taught women privately, and there is every indication that, being in the multitudes which followed Him, they heard His public teaching. The story of the feeding of the five thousand specifically states that there were women present in the crowd that followed the Master. Matthew expressly says so (14:21) while the use of *ἀνῆρ* by the other writers "implies the remark."<sup>15</sup>

Another indication that women were present in the crowds that heard Jesus' teaching is the interesting use He makes of women in His

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<sup>13</sup> Joachim Jeremias, "The Gentile World in the Thought of Jesus," Bulletin III Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas (Oxford: Oxonian Press, 1952), p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> Mark 7:25-30; Matthew 15:21-28.

<sup>15</sup> Westcott, op. cit., I, 213.

parables and illustrations. The parable of the mustard seed (Luke 13:18-19) which a man took and planted is countered by the parable of the leaven (Luke 13:20-21) which a woman took and hid in the meal. If these twin parables are simply different aspects of the same truth,<sup>16</sup> it is not unlikely that Christ varied the figure in order to capture the attention of the men and women who were in the "great multitudes" that gathered unto Him on this occasion (Matt. 13:2).

This same phenomenon is repeated in another pair of parables recorded in Luke 15. The Lord speaks first of the joy of a man on finding the sheep that was lost (vs. 3-7), and then of the joy of a woman who finds the lost coin (vs. 8-10). Although Godet thinks that the omission of ἐξ ὁμῶν in verse eight (cf. vs. 4) "may mean none but men in this throng,"<sup>17</sup> it is an argument from silence which even he puts forth only as a possibility. More likely it is a similar case to that of the first pair of parables. Certainly there is no question but that the main point of these parables is that "each sinner is so precious that God and His Ministers regard no efforts too great to reclaim such."<sup>18</sup> Plummer further suggests that the use of a woman's experience

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<sup>16</sup> Godet, op. cit., II, 122.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., II, 148.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901, ICC), p. 370.



in the second parable shows that "women also may work for the recovery of sinners."<sup>19</sup>

On other occasions the Lord is said to have spoken of an importunate friend who comes asking food at midnight and of an importunate widow to illustrate His teaching concerning prayer.<sup>20</sup> To teach His followers peace of mind He pointed them to the lilies of the field which do not toil (man's work) or spin (woman's work).<sup>21</sup> To prepare them for His second coming to earth, Jesus told His disciples that when it occurs one (εἷς) of two men in the field and one (μία) of two women grinding would be taken and the others left.<sup>22</sup> Admittedly it would be impossible to prove that women were actually present on each occasion cited (though it is clear enough that they were present in some instances); nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the use our Lord makes of women in these parables and illustrations "is in fact evidence of His special interest in them."<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, our Lord Jesus taught women individually and in private. Indeed, some of the most profound revelations concerning

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<sup>19</sup> Plummer, loc. cit.

<sup>20</sup> Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-5.

<sup>21</sup> Matthew 6:28.

<sup>22</sup> Matthew 24:40-41.

<sup>23</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., p. 5.

Himself and His Father were given in these instances. That He did this indicates not only His appreciation of the intellectual capacity in women but also of their spiritual capabilities.

The first of these incidents is said to have taken place on the Lord's journey from Judea to Galilee when he passed through Samaria.<sup>24</sup> While sitting at Jacob's well, while the disciples were in the town buying food, He held a long theological conversation with a Samaritan harlot. The Rabbis had said that a man should not salute a woman, not even his own wife, in a public place<sup>25</sup> though this was probably not rigidly followed, else we might have expected that the Pharisees would have accused Jesus at this point more often.<sup>26</sup> To talk to her may not have been out of the ordinary practice; but to teach her certainly was. To have this kind of intercourse with a Samaritan, with whom the Jews had no dealings (vs. 9), was breaking all convention and showed Jesus' wider interest in the peoples outside Judaism. That He should deal with a harlot shows His compassion and interest in the neediest of creatures. It is rightly said that "in this combination of freedom and pity . . . he makes a new departure of enormous significance and importance."<sup>27</sup> The entire scene was "a strange innovation on Rabbinic

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<sup>24</sup> John 4:1-42.

<sup>25</sup> Aboth, i. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Montefiore, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>27</sup> Loc. cit.

custom and dignity,"<sup>28</sup> and since there is no evident theological reason for inserting a female person into this story, we may assume an historic basis. Although there will not be universal agreement as to what may have actually been said to this woman or what the meaning may have been, one can hardly deny that this discourse involves deep truths, for living water and proper worship are included in this account. Furthermore, although there is no word of command from our Lord to this woman to testify of what she had been taught, still Jesus did not seem to disapprove of or reject her witness which brought many men to Himself. Women, indeed, may work for the reclamation of sinners.

On many occasions it is said our Lord visited the house of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. On the very first recorded visit<sup>29</sup> He is found teaching Mary who "sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word" (vs. 39). After some time Martha, who was distracted with much serving and who "could not think that a woman could, in such manner [as Mary's], fulfil her duty, or show forth her religious profiting,"<sup>30</sup> complains that her sister should also be helping with the domestic preparations. Our Lord in reply taught her with gentle reproof and yet

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<sup>28</sup> Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, I, 418.

<sup>29</sup> Luke 10:38-42.

<sup>30</sup> Edersheim, op. cit., II, 147.

with affection that "one thing is needful" (vs. 42); i.e., the care of the spiritual life should take precedence.<sup>31</sup>

Later in our Lord's ministry, one of the members of this home, Lazarus, is taken in death.<sup>32</sup> When Jesus came four days after Lazarus had died He revealed to these two sisters the profound truth that Resurrection and Life are the outcome of His very being. Since resurrection at the end of time was part of the religious hope of every Jew, Martha doubtless thought that Jesus' first words to her--"Thy brother shall rise again" (vs. 23)--were nothing more than the "accustomed consolation."<sup>33</sup> But our Lord reveals to her that:

. . . the Resurrection of the Dead is no longer bound up purely or primarily with an historical event at the end of time, but connects immediately with the Person of Jesus Christ and with the life which He bestows here and now.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, it should be remembered that much of Jesus' teaching was to men and especially to His twelve disciples, but these instances are ample proof of His interest in women, His confidence in their capabilities, and His concern for their spiritual education and welfare.

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<sup>31</sup> Some authorities read, 'few things are needful;' i.e., simpler entertainment would suffice. Cf. William Manson, The Gospel of Luke (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930, MNTC), p. 133.

<sup>32</sup> John 11:1-44.

<sup>33</sup> William Manson, The Incarnate Glory (London: James Clarke & Co., 1923), p. 168.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

### III. APPRECIATION OF WOMAN'S ABILITY TO SERVE

There remain yet for consideration a number of accounts which give indications of the kind of service Jesus appreciated from women. On one occasion He used a woman to teach some religious leaders the grace of forgiveness in the mixing of mercy with the law, and although this incident recorded in John 8:2-11 is poorly attested, it nonetheless probably rests on an historic event.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, on another occasion, the sacrificial giving of a widow was used to teach the disciples "the true appreciation of human actions according to their quality, in opposition to the quantitative appreciation which forms the essence of pharisaism."<sup>36</sup> In other words, our Lord held up to men the lives and examples of women.

On at least two occasions Jesus received the public testimony of women. While teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, He called, as if deliberately, a woman to Him and healed her of her infirmity. She immediately glorified God so as to bring an indignant rebuke from the ruler of the synagogue.<sup>37</sup> In the other incident, the healing of the woman who touched the hem of Jesus' garment, our Lord called for the

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<sup>35</sup> It is omitted by X, A, B, C, L, N, W, Y, cf. Constantinus Tischendorf, Novum Testamentum Graece (Lipsiae: Giesecke & Devrient, 1869), I, 826-30.

<sup>36</sup> Codet, op. cit., II, 256 (cf. Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4).

<sup>37</sup> Luke 13:10-17.

declaration of her faith. No doubt this was done "to bring her to clearness in the exercise of her faith,"<sup>38</sup> but in so doing she gave her testimony "before all the people."<sup>39</sup>

On two other occasions our Lord was annointed by women.<sup>40</sup> It is not necessary for present purposes to enter into a discussion of whether or not these are actually two different occasions;<sup>41</sup> the important point is that Jesus received such worship and affection from women. In the first instance the woman was probably a prostitute, and Jesus' receiving of her act of reverence lays His own character open to question. In the other instance Mary's costly ointment pays the highest tribute to the Master, for "this was the kind of demonstration reserved for princes or persons of great distinction"<sup>42</sup> (cf. *Psa.* 23:5). It is a woman who leads the way in saying "that no tribute is rich enough to pay to Him."<sup>43</sup> This kind of worship He not only receives but defends before all.

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<sup>38</sup> Edersheim, *op. cit.*, I, 628.

<sup>39</sup> *Luke* 8:47.

<sup>40</sup> *Luke* 7:36-50; *John* 12:1-11.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Plummer, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

<sup>42</sup> Marcus Dods, *The Gospel of St. John* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1908), II, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Loc. cit.*



If anything is to be made here of the words of Jesus that in the resurrection men and women neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like the angels,<sup>44</sup> it would simply be that they show His tacit approval of the purpose of earthly marriage as the perpetuation of the race. Commenting on these difficult verses, another has said:

For this--the non-existence of wedlock in Heaven--our Lord gives the reason in the clause "for neither can they die any more;" to which the words "and therefore there is no need of births," may be appended as a corollary.

.....  
It is to marriage as we know it on earth--marriage having for its object the perpetuation of the race--and to this alone that our Lord's expressions apply.<sup>45</sup>

If this be the meaning, then the importance of the part that women play in bearing and rearing of children is evident.

Certain conclusions from all these passages--some important and some not so important--are conspicuous. Jesus opened the privileges of religious faith as equally to women as to men. He gave His message publicly and privately to women as well as men. The frequent and prominent mention of women in the Gospels is in itself noteworthy by contrast with their status in Judaism. Christ gladly received certain kinds of service from women including their public testimony. There can be no doubt that as regards spiritual privilege Jesus considered the two sexes to be equal.

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<sup>44</sup> Mark 12:25; Matthew 22:30; Luke 20:35-36.

<sup>45</sup> Henry Latham, A Service of Angels (Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1896), p. 53.

But as regards spiritual activity, there was a difference between that assigned to men and to women. What is not said about women is as important as what is said. Allworthy, who has been cited several times in this chapter, neglects to point out these significant silences in the record with the result that one's impression from his work of Jesus' attitude toward women is not balanced. It is significant that Jesus chose and sent out seventy men.<sup>46</sup> It is significant that there was no woman chosen among the twelve disciples. It is significant that the Lord's Supper was instituted in the presence of men only. The Apostolic commissions of John 20:19-23 and Matthew 28:16-20 were given to men though it is true that the Holy Spirit fell upon women as well on the Day of Pentecost. But it is evident that "these facts taken together are proof that there were functions and responsibilities which at the first our Lord assigned to men and did not assign to women."<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, in spite of Harnack's attributing Hebrews to the pen of Priscilla<sup>48</sup> and Bacon's conjecture that the Revelation was written by

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<sup>46</sup> Luke 10:1 ff.

<sup>47</sup> The Ministry of Women (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), p. 2.

<sup>48</sup> A. Harnack, "Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebraerbriefs," Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, I, 16-41.



one of the four prophesying daughters of Philip the evangelist,<sup>49</sup> it is generally considered that no woman was granted the privilege of being the author of any book in the New Testament canon. Surely in the light of this it is impossible to say, as one woman writer does, that "there is no teaching at all from our Lord about the virtues, ideals or sphere of my sex."<sup>50</sup> There is equality in certain spheres, but marked differences in others.

In the light of this evidence, the word revolution does not seem too strong a one to use of the appreciation of woman which Jesus introduced. Though there were definite limitations--things He did not appreciate, if it may be put that way--His free and merciful attitude toward women introduced a revolutionary appraisal of them. And it may be true, too, that the manner in which women themselves received this new message had important bearing on their higher status in the early church.<sup>51</sup> There remains yet to elaborate in a positive way this sphere of service which women filled in the gospels.

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<sup>49</sup> Benjamin W. Bacon, "The Authoress of Revelation--A Conjecture" (New Haven: Harvard Theological Review, Vol. xxiii, No. 33, July, 1930), pp. 235-250.

<sup>50</sup> Royden Shaw, "Ordination of Women," The Modern Churchman (Vol. XXXVII, Nov. 1947), p. 299.

<sup>51</sup> As suggested by Leopold Zscharnack, Der Dienst der Frau in den ersten Jahrhunderten der christlichen Kirche (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), pp. 16-17.

## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN AS MINISTERS TO JESUS

Unique in the Gospel accounts is the place accorded to women as ministers to the person of our Lord Jesus. Adeney declares:

Our Lord's relations with the women who attended Him are distinct from His relations with the men disciples in one very remarkable particular. He ministered to the men; but the women ministered to Him. In their case Jesus consented to receive gifts and service.<sup>1</sup>

The occurrences of *διακονέω*, *διακονία* and *διάκονος* in the four gospels show at once that whenever ministry is spoken of as being rendered directly to Jesus, it is that of angels or of women. After the experience of the temptation, there were angels who "came and ministered unto him."<sup>2</sup> All of the other instances concern the ministry of women. In the story of the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, she is said to have "ministered" unto the Lord and those in her house.<sup>3</sup> Mention is made of a band of women who "ministered unto him of their substance,"<sup>4</sup> and on two occasions it is recorded of Martha that she served Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter F. Adeney, Women of the New Testament (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1901), p. 100.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 4:11; Mark 1:13.

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:15; Mark 1:31; Luke 4:39.

<sup>4</sup> Luke 8:3; cf. Matthew 27:55 and Mark 15:41.

<sup>5</sup> Luke 10:40 and John 12:2.

Although διακονέω may be used in an official sense of serving as deacons, or in a general sense of attending to anything, or in a particular sense of waiting tables and supplying food and the necessities of life,<sup>6</sup> it is limited in the gospel records of the women who ministered to Jesus to the latter usage. Martha waited on the table, the band of women provided money, and Peter's mother-in-law evidently prepared some food for that occasion. In the light of this, it is not entirely accurate to say, as Adeney does, of these women that "theirs was the higher honour among His followers."<sup>7</sup> It would seem more proper to say that it was a different honour, for it was related to a particular sphere of service. Nonetheless, it is significant that of no man is it recorded that he ministered to Jesus.

Jewish scribes were supposed to support themselves financially by some trade, for every Jewish father's obligations to his son were to "circumcise him, redeem him, teach him Torah, teach him a trade, and get him a wife--some say also, teach him to swim."<sup>8</sup> In the time of our Lord, however, many had evidently abandoned a trade as a means of livelihood and were being supported by the generosity of well-to-do women.

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<sup>6</sup> Walter Bauer, Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Topelmann, 1952), p. 333.

<sup>7</sup> Adeney, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Moore, op. cit., II, 127.

An improper abuse of this is what Josephus evidently had in mind when he wrote:

For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favoured by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus Himself also spoke out against the abuse of this practice.<sup>10</sup>

However, that it might be practiced without impropriety is evident from the fact that no surprise is shown or criticism levelled at Jesus' receiving money from wealthy women.

The first mention of a band of women ministering to our Lord is recorded in Luke 8:2,3.

And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, which ministered unto him of their substance.

Actually this is the only passage in the gospels which tells how Jesus and His disciples lived when they were not being entertained by hospitable persons. "The common purse (Jn. xiii. 29; comp. xii. 6) was kept supplied by the generosity of pious women. This form of piety was not rare."<sup>11</sup>

Five of this ministering band who followed Jesus throughout His ministry are mentioned by name (Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, Mary,

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<sup>9</sup> Antiquities, XVII, II, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47.

<sup>11</sup> Alfred Plummer, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Luke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), p. 215.

Salome), but each of the synoptic writers mentions that there were many others.<sup>12</sup> Wordsworth concludes that Joanna and Salome were widows because "we cannot for a moment suppose that our Lord would have approved of married women, with home duties, neglecting them for ministry to Himself."<sup>13</sup> While this might be a convenient conclusion for a thesis such as this, it is hardly a reliable one even in these cases, to say nothing of the "many others."

In every list of these women given by the synoptic writers the name of Mary Magdalene stands first.<sup>14</sup> In the apocryphal Gospel of Peter she is called "a disciple of the Lord,"<sup>15</sup> and Adeney is doubtless correct in saying of her:

There is reason to suppose that Mary Magdalene was in less humble circumstances than most of our Lord's disciples. Not only is she one of those who maintain the common purse which meets the wants of Jesus and the twelve, but she assumes a certain prominence in the narrative especially towards the end indicating a place of distinction among the ministering women.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 8:3.

<sup>13</sup> John Wordsworth, The Ministry of Grace (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), p. 259.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:55; but see John 19:25 where Mary the mother of Jesus is mentioned first and Mary Magdalene last.

<sup>15</sup> XII:50. The word used is *μαθήτρια* which is found in the New Testament only at Acts 9:36.

<sup>16</sup> Adeney, op. cit., p. 198.

Joanna was the wife of Chuza who "was probably entrusted with some office in the household of Herod Antipas. Might he not be that βασιλικός, court lord, whose son Jesus healed (John iv.), and who had believed with all his house?"<sup>17</sup> It has been suggested that it was through this disciple that Luke received the facts incorporated in his gospel concerning the events surrounding the birth of our Lord.<sup>18</sup>

Susanna is only mentioned in Luke 8:3. Mary the mother of James the less and wife of Clopas belongs to this band of ministering women (Matt. 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 24:10; John 19:25). The last one named is Salome (mentioned only in Mark 15:40 by name) the mother of James and John, and according to Westcott, the sister of the Virgin Mary (John 19:25).<sup>19</sup> These plus the "many others" ministered to Jesus of their substance and followed Him from place to place. There is no doubt that they accompanied the Lord; there can be little doubt that He taught them on occasion (cf. Lk. 10:38-42); and certainly such "treatment of the women who 'ministered' to Him . . . distinguished Him from other teachers whose needs were met in a similar way."<sup>20</sup> Mary and

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<sup>17</sup> F. Godet, A Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), I, 365.

<sup>18</sup> W. Sanday, "Jesus Christ," A Dictionary of the Bible, James Hastings, editor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), II, 644.

<sup>19</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, The Gospel According to St John (London: John Murray, 1908), II, 313.

<sup>20</sup> T. B. Allworthy, Women in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1917), p. 8.

Martha of Bethany also ministered in respect to material needs, but this ministry was confined to their home; they did not follow Jesus about as did the others.<sup>21</sup>

"It is in the accounts of the crucifixion and resurrection that the women disciples become prominent in the Gospels."<sup>22</sup> Some of this band of ministering women followed Christ to Jerusalem to the last Passover and were found at the scene of the crucifixion.<sup>23</sup> At some point during the hours of the crucifixion they had evidently moved within talking distance of the cross.<sup>24</sup> They continued to follow their Lord even to the place of His burial and made preparation to minister further to His body by preparing the spices and ointments.<sup>25</sup> Since it was the Sabbath they rested, but coming the next day with those spices they found the empty tomb.

Without attempting to harmonize the accounts of the resurrection, it may be said that with the possible exception of Peter, women were the first to receive the news of our Lord's resurrection.<sup>26</sup> Not

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Luke 10:38-42; John 12:2.

<sup>22</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49.

<sup>24</sup> John 19:25.

<sup>25</sup> Luke 23:55-56.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew 28:1; Mark 16:1; Luke 24:1, 34; John 20:1; 1 Corinthians 15:5.



only that, but they were the first to carry the news of the resurrection,<sup>27</sup> and although their word was not believed immediately by the disciples, our Lord's rebuke of the disciples shows that He expected them to believe.<sup>28</sup> However, one is deterred from making the conclusion which seems to be obvious from the foregoing statements by the fact that St. Paul does not include a single woman's name in the list of witnesses he cites when writing to the Corinthians. Three questions thus arise: (1) Why were women chosen to be told first of Christ's resurrection? (2) Why does Paul entirely omit any mention of women in his list of witnesses? (3) What conclusions may be drawn from the answers to the first two questions with regard to women's status?

A number of answers to the first question have been suggested. Allworthy makes this sweeping statement: "This privilege [of knowing of the resurrection first] alone must have secured, not for the women disciples only but for their sex, a position of honour in the Church of the first days."<sup>29</sup> This seems to ignore the important fact that these women were told, on the occasion of the resurrection at least, to go tell the (men) disciples, not the whole world. One might also wonder why a woman was not nominated to fill Judas' place among the twelve if they had achieved in "the first days" such a place of honor. A much

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<sup>27</sup> Matthew 28:7; Mark 16:7; Luke 24:9; John 20:17.

<sup>28</sup> Mark 16:11, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., p. 13.



more plausible explanation is that the Lord honored these women in order to chastize the male disciples who were unfaithful in the hours of His Passion. According to this view it would be said that:

The significance of the women's precedence, then, is not that here at last woman comes to her own rightful place, her natural worth being at last discovered and appropriately recognized (though it is, of course, true that the Easter narrative is of the very highest importance for the Christian understanding of woman), but rather that God honours those whom the world (both pagan and Jewish) dishonoured, in order that no flesh, whether male or female, might glory before Him.<sup>30</sup>

Although no one seems to state outright this third answer (it is certainly implied in the quotation above), one would suggest that the reason these women were so honored was simply that they were being faithful to womanly duties. After all, they were present at the tomb that first Easter morning simply because they were bringing spices for the body, an act which they had been prevented from doing earlier because of the Sabbath. Surely this was not a man's work but only something faithful women would have done. They were ministering in the sense of caring for physical needs in the time of Jesus' death as they had so often done in the time of His life. This suggestion is not put forth to replace Cranfield's idea of chastisement but to supplement it, for there seems to be no reason why God should not so honor women who had been faithful in upholding the responsibilities of their sex.

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<sup>30</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, "St. Mark 16:1-8," Scottish Journal of Theology (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd Ltd.), Vol. 5, No. 3, p. 283-84.

The well-known answer to the second question, Why did St. Paul omit the mention of the women's testimony in 1 Corinthians 15, is that since the witness of women could not be official, it could not be used in that context of formal proof that Christ was seen after His resurrection. In other words it was because "outside Christian circles, the evidence of women would have been dismissed as of little value. Had it been adduced, it would have been ridiculed as the fantasies of excitable females."<sup>31</sup> This view does not go unchallenged. Knowling says:

But let us bear in mind the official character of the Apostle's selection, and we shall see at once that he appeals to those by name who would claim special credit in the Church, and that it would be nothing to the point to lay stress upon the testimony of women whose names, however valued elsewhere, would carry little or no weight in Corinth.<sup>32</sup>

Allworthy seizes upon this lest the importance of women (and the validity of his thesis) be diminished.<sup>33</sup> Before accepting this, however, one should ask, What was Paul's purpose in that chapter? It was to prove that Jesus "was seen" (1 Cor. 15:5). Does this require quality or quantity of witnesses? It certainly involves both. Otherwise, of what point is his mention of the five hundred brethren of whom a majority were alive at that time (vs. 6)? It is unlikely that any of

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<sup>31</sup> F. F. Bruce, The Dawn of Christianity (London: The Paternoster Press, 1950), p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> R. J. Knowling, The Testimony of St. Paul to Christ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), pp. 301-302.

<sup>33</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., p. 14.

that group lived in Corinth and would carry no weight to that church except for the fact that they add considerably to the total number of living witnesses of the resurrection. If quantity is partly Paul's point, then why did he not also include a phrase "and a number of women?" There must have been some reason for its omission, and we are driven back to the conclusion that it was simply that the witness of women would lack official status. That conclusion is strengthened by the fact that the objection that the women's story was the "fantasies of excitable females" was raised in the second century by Celsus.<sup>34</sup> The well-known answer, then, seems also to be the most satisfactory one. It does not nullify the validity of their testimony nor diminish the honor accorded them as first witnesses of the empty tomb; it simply, once again, limits the sphere of their work.

The third question, Of what significance is all this, is practically answered and that answer well summarizes this section. In the life of our Lord women had a very special place as ministers to Him in a sense in which no man was His minister. This ministry consisted in caring for His physical wants by hospitality, by giving of money, and in His death by the preparation of spices. Our Lord's response to this is significant, for He allowed the women to follow Him, He taught them, He honored them with the first announcement of the resurrection. But, as was seen in the preceeding section, He limited their activity by not

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<sup>34</sup> Origen, Against Celsus, II, 58.

choosing one of them for official work. In this section it was pointed out that while He rewarded their faithfulness, He only commissioned them to tell those who would be official witnesses; i.e., the disciples. In all of this we conclude that the Lord Jesus, while granting great freedom to women and giving importance to their ministry, limited the sphere of that activity by glorifying, as it were, their domestic responsibilities with which they served Him.

## CHAPTER V

### JESUS' TEACHING ON DIVORCE

In Jesus' teaching on the question of divorce are contained some of the clearest and most definite revelations of the mind of the Founder of the Church concerning the status of women in that Church. This contribution from our Lord is of such significance and importance that Montefiore can say of it without exaggeration: "If he had done no more than this, he might justly be regarded as one of the great teachers of the world."<sup>1</sup> Apart from the obvious observation that Jesus' standard in this matter was not only a radically new departure but was also considerably higher than the standard of His day, few writers draw other conclusions from His teaching. This is doubtless due to the fact that determining what was the precise mind of Jesus on the subject is fraught with problems and difficulties in the record which has been left. Consequently, in order that conclusions with regard to the status of women may be accurate, full, and complete, it will first be necessary to try to determine the exact teaching of our Lord on this question of divorce.

#### I. THE HISTORICAL SITUATION

Unquestionably, Jewish law allowed for divorce on almost any ground once proceedings had been initiated, for "there was no marriage

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<sup>1</sup> C. G. Montefiore, Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings (London: Macmillan and Co., 1930), p. 47.

among the Jewish people which could not have been dissolved immediately by the man in fully legal form by handing out a bill of divorce."<sup>2</sup> The biblical basis of this was Deuteronomy 24:1 and especially the words  $\gamma\gamma\tau \pi\pi\gamma\upsilon$ . It was not a question in the time of Jesus whether a man had the right of divorce--that was guaranteed by the law, but on what grounds he might set the law in motion was the question which divided the Rabbis. Divorces were granted because a woman merely broke a single part of the Mosaic law, or when the behaviour of a woman was such as to put her husband in a bad light, or because of barrenness, or if illness or the occupation of the husband was such as to make continued living with him unthinkable.<sup>3</sup>

At the time of Jesus, however, there were principally two schools of thought on the interpretation of Deuteronomy 24:1. The followers of Shammai were the strict and rigorous interpreters of the law. They read  $\gamma\gamma\tau \pi\pi\gamma\upsilon$  as "uncleanness of behaviour" and emphasized the word uncleanness. Consequently they held that a man could not divorce his wife unless he found her guilty of sexual immorality. The school of Hillel was more lax in its interpretation, disjoining the words  $\gamma\gamma\tau \pi\pi\gamma\upsilon$  and reading them "uncleanness, or anything

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<sup>2</sup> Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Oskar Beck, 1922), I, 319-20.

<sup>3</sup> For further detail and references to the Mishna and Talmud cf. Strack-Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 312-320 and David Werner Amram, The Jewish Law of Divorce (London: David Nutt, 1897), 41-53, 63-77.

else." Being more lenient this view enjoyed greater popularity and was usually adopted.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, opposition between the schools and their followers remained strong. It is easy now to understand why the Pharisees, when they came tempting the Lord about this matter, asked Him if it were legal for a man to put away his wife for every cause,<sup>5</sup> for "they seem to have thought that Jesus must either pronounce in favour of one or the other of these schools, and so either support a lax morality, or become less popular."<sup>6</sup>

In Damascus during the first century before Christ there lived a Jewish sectarian group known as the Zadokites. They taught and practiced monogamy, forbidding divorce on the grounds of the account of creation and of the monogamous pairs that came out of the ark. In the "Fragments of a Zadokite Sect" their teaching is set forth:

The builders of the wall who walk after law--the law it is which talks, of which He said: Assuredly they shall talk--are caught [by two] by fornication in taking two wives during their lifetime. But the fundamental principle of creation is "Male and Female created He them." And they who went into the Ark, "Two and two went into the Ark." (7:1-3)<sup>7</sup>

Although there is resemblance between this teaching and that of our

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<sup>4</sup> Gittin, ix. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 19:3.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Robinson, The Evangelists and the Mishna (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1859), p. 109.

<sup>7</sup> R. H. Charles, editor, The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1913), II, 810.



Lord,

. . . because this teaching did not develop to its full on Palestinian soil and because it was sectarian in nature as a defiance of the teachers of the law, it has had little or no influence on the main stream of Jewish life.<sup>8</sup>

This, then, was the historical situation in which our Lord's words were spoken. The right of divorce was unquestioned and was primarily the man's. Though the practice of divorce may not have been so common as one might be led to believe due to the financial considerations involved (cf. page 16), there is "painful evidence of the laxity of views" on the question.<sup>9</sup> It is very important to remember that in all this the Rabbis did not prohibit divorce, for, even in the strict school of Shammai, it was a question of the ground of divorce, not the right of divorce. Into such a situation our Lord came with His startling doctrine.

## II. THE TEACHING OF JESUS

The teaching of Jesus on divorce is contained in the following passages:

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement: But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication [παρεκτός λόγου πορνείας], causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery.

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<sup>8</sup> Louis M. Epstein, Marriage Laws in the Bible and the Talmud (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Edersheim, The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, II, 333.



The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a writing of divorcement, and to put her away? He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication [μὴ ἐπὶ πορνείᾳ], and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.

And the Pharisees came to him, and asked him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife? tempting him. And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you? And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away. And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept. But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife; And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. And in the house his disciples asked him again of the same matter. And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she committeth adultery.

Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.<sup>10</sup>

Although there are many problems and questions connected with these passages, certain features are unquestionably outstanding. First of all, it is obvious that Jesus' teaching was startling. One needs

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 5:31-2; 19:3-9; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18.

only to notice the reaction of the disciples to His words.

His disciples say unto him, If the case of the man be so with his wife, it is not good to marry. But he said unto them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.<sup>11</sup>

Evidently from this answer the disciples understood clearly that:

The standard here set up was so high, the law so severe in its obligations, that, fearing when there should be no possibility of putting a complete end to the union, its trials and temptations might prove unbearable, they suggested that, under the circumstances, the wisest course would be to abjure marriage altogether.<sup>12</sup>

Our Lord does not say that celibacy is the preferred alternative, but the fact that the disciples suggested it assures us that they understood Jesus' teaching to be something startlingly different from what they knew in Judaism, and "in the answer which Christ gave, there is not the slightest hint that they had exaggerated the force of His teaching. . . ."<sup>13</sup>

Not only was the doctrine startling, but, it was more rigid than the accepted Jewish doctrine of the day. In the first place, the one-sidedness of the Jewish law respecting adultery is corrected. The

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew 19:10-12.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Mortimer Lucklock, The History of Marriage (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1894), p. 70.

<sup>13</sup> Loc. cit.

point is well explained in the following words:

. . . the essential point is that in Jewish Law adultery is always intercourse between a married woman and a man other than her husband. . . . Hence while a woman can commit adultery against her husband, a man cannot commit adultery against his wife. He can only commit adultery against another married man. . . . The principle that a man cannot commit adultery against his own wife is flatly contradicted in Mk. 10, where the words 'against her' can only refer to the first wife.<sup>14</sup>

In the second place, Jesus, instead of supporting either the school of Shammai or that of Hillel, leads his hearers

. . . back to the original institution of marriage, and shows that the bond was intended by God to be indissoluble, and that divorce was only a permission under the Mosaic law, for which they should rather be humbled, than, as they were wont to do, make it the subject of triumph as a mark of the Divine regard to their nation.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the Lord removes divorce, and all that is involved in its relation to the status of women, from under Jewish legal jurisdiction and elevates marriage and women to that ideal state described in the accounts of Genesis before the fall of man and the entrance of sin.

In setting these utterances by the side of those of Hillel and Shammai, it should be remembered that they were jurisconsults called upon to pronounce authoritatively what the law was; while Jesus, having no such authority or responsibility, undertook to say what, on ideal principles, the law ought to be, Moses to the contrary notwithstanding.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> H. D. A. Major, T. W. Manson, C. J. Wright, The Mission and Message of Jesus (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1937), p. 428.

<sup>15</sup> Robinson, loc. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Moore, op. cit., II, 125.

Not only did Jesus transcend Jewish law, but He also had a word to say in relation to Roman law and divorce. At the time of Herod Roman law allowed women to divorce their husbands,<sup>17</sup> and it was under this Roman law that divorces were given by the women of Herod's family. This "seems to have attracted the attention of Jesus, and he strongly condemned it, saying, 'if a woman shall put away her husband and be married to another she committeth adultery'. . . ." <sup>18</sup> Therefore, the teaching of Jesus was more rigid than both the religious and political law of His time.

In addition to these outstanding and unquestioned features of the Lord's teaching, there are questions and problems surrounding His words which must be considered before coming to any conclusions. These problems center in the exception made of the case of fornication in Matthew's gospel, and their solution is important in relation to what has been said above.

### III. THE PROBLEM IN MATTHEW'S GOSPEL

Either Jesus disallowed divorce entirely or He allowed it in the single instance of fornication (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). If the latter, then He does not rise much above the school of Shammai in His teaching; however, it must be evident from what has been said that the writer holds

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<sup>17</sup> Amram, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 61-2.

to the former view. Yet, this has not been proved, for some answer must be given to the problem of the "excepting clause" in these passages in Matthew. The views are many, but it is not within the province of this thesis to champion one and defend it against all others. Rather, it is one's task to demonstrate that there is an explanation of the excepting clause which does not violate sound scholarship but which supports the thesis that Jesus disallowed divorce entirely and by so doing raised the status of women to the ideal plane of the stories of man before the fall. Fortunately, the many explanations may be sifted into three categories.

Explanation based on the authority of the Church. Typically, the Roman Catholic Church bases its explanation of the exception of Matthew on the dogma of the Church. The Church, of course, admits no exception that sanctions divorce but is faced with the problem of making all texts consistent. One of their writers says that "that explanation is at once found if we consider that the words 'put away' in St. Matthew refer to separation only and not to dissolution."<sup>19</sup> This explanation that ἀπολύω means separation from bed and board was one of the decrees of the Council of Trent. Hunter has no need of substantiating grammatically that meaning for ἀπολύω, for his real basis of

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<sup>19</sup> Sylvester Joseph Hunter, Outline of Dogmatic Theology (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1900), III, 416.

explanation is clearly revealed in this statement:

What we have given seems the simplest explanation of the difficulty. . . . and the matter affords a good instance of the impossibility of arriving at any assured interpretation of Scripture, except in the light of the traditional teaching of the Catholic Church.<sup>20</sup>

One would not even submit this view as a worthy explanation of the difficulty.

Explanation based on the evidence of source criticism. The most common Protestant interpretation concludes

. . . that the exceptive clause in the first Gospel is an interpolation, which really alters the sense of our Lord's original utterance about marriage, and that His real teaching is that given in St. Mark's and St. Luke's Gospels. . . .<sup>21</sup>

If the compiler of the first Gospel used Mark and Q as his sources, then there is little question that the exception in Matthew 19 (which is parallel to Mark 10) is an interpolation, and very likely that also is the case in Matthew 5 (although this is more difficult to prove since the original form of the saying drawn from Q in this case is uncertain). Nevertheless, this conclusion that Mark's record prohibiting divorce represents the true mind of Christ is supported by other considerations.

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<sup>20</sup> Hunter, loc. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Gore, The Question of Divorce (London: John Murray, 1911), p. 23.



The first is suggested by Salmon:

. . . it seems to me that St Mark's version, which appears to disallow divorce without any exception, is more likely to represent the common source than St Matthew's, which excepts the case of the adulterous wife. For it is much easier to account for St Matthew's insertion of the words than for St Mark's omission of them, if they had been in the original.<sup>22</sup>

The second is an argument from context, for if the Lord taught an absolute standard as Mark and Luke reveal, then according to the context of Matthew 5: "Teaching such as this is entirely in harmony with the teaching about murder (21-24) and about adultery (27,28), and is above the level of the best Jewish teaching."<sup>23</sup>

Finally, Allen suggests a third reason for concluding that the excepting clause is a gloss. He suggests that "the interpolated clause confuses the issues. If a man divorced his wife for *πορνεία*, he would not then cause her to commit adultery, because she would already be guilty of this crime."<sup>24</sup>

R. H. Charles takes great exception to this line of reasoning and attempts to show from the documentary evidence that Mark is unreliable and that the excepting clause should be retained as representing

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<sup>22</sup> George Salmon, The Human Element in the Gospels (London: John Murray, 1908), pp. 130-31.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Plummer, An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (London: Elliot Stock, 1909), p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> Willoughby C. Allen, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907), p. 51.

the mind of Jesus. His argument is as follows:

Thus it is shown not only that the narrative in Mark x. 2-12 is untrustworthy, but also that the First Evangelist (Matt. xix. 3-9) deliberately rejected the Marcan record as unhistorical and replaced it by a record of events drawn from Q . . . .

. . . it follows that the original narrative in Q, from which Matt. xix. 3-9 and Luke xvi. 18 are independently derived, was not designed to prove the indissolubility of marriage, but to condemn divorce when resorted to on inadequate grounds . . . .<sup>25</sup>

Thus Charles is contending that the uncertain contents of Q contained the words of exception and are to be accepted in preference to the Marcan record. Is it not, however, risky to reject a source we do have as "untrustworthy" on the basis of the supposed contents of one we do not have? Actually, Charles' real basis for his conclusions is not critical evidence but historical factors, for he declares that Mark is to be considered unhistorical for omitting the excepting clause since Christ's answer "would have been incomprehensible to a Jew in the time of our Lord. . . ."<sup>26</sup> But that is just the point. The Pharisees did not come to "ask for information, but in order to draw from Him utterances on which they could found an accusation,"<sup>27</sup> and our Lord confronted them with a new and startling doctrine.

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<sup>25</sup> R. H. Charles, Divorce and the Roman Dogma of Nullity (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1927), v.-vii.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Salmon, op. cit., p. 391.



On the basis of source evidence, the true explanation seems to be that our Lord forbade divorce and that the excepting clause in Matthew is an added interpolation, "representing no doubt two influences, viz. Jewish custom and tradition and the exigencies of ethical necessity in the early Christian Church."<sup>28</sup>

Explanation based on the authority of inspiration. If one has a very high view of the doctrine of inspiration (the verbal plenary theory) neither of the above explanations would be satisfactory. Those who hold such a view are divided into two groups. Some do not give the Synoptic problem consideration and are consequently forced to the conclusion (for the Scripture cannot contradict itself and a gloss is unthinkable) that fornication is a legitimate reason for divorce.<sup>29</sup> Others who are more intellectually honest recognize that a search for the source material of the gospels is not heresy and yet would not admit the "gloss of an editor" explanation since the manuscript evidence supports the inclusion of the excepting clause. For such Bruce

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<sup>28</sup> Allen, op. cit., p. 52. This is supported by Bacon's contention that "Mt is a 'converted rabbi.' His ideal, his methods . . . all show the characteristics of the trained teacher of the Synagogue." (Cf. Benjamin W. Bacon, Studies in Matthew (London: Constable and Co., 1930), p. 132).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. John Murray, Divorce (Philadelphia: The Committee on Christian Education, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 1953), pp. 20-21, 46-47; Randolph McKim, Marriage and Divorce According to the Teaching of Jesus Christ our Lord (Press of the Church Standard, 1904), p. 3; and F. C. Jennings, Does Death Alone Break The Marriage Relation? (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1931), p. 28.

suggests an explanation from Clarke which does not violate such a doctrine of verbal inspiration and yet which is aware of the textual evidence leading to the conclusion that Jesus forbade divorce altogether.<sup>30</sup> Specifically, the solution is that *πορνεία* denotes marital relations within the forbidden degrees of Leviticus 18. In outlining this view Clarke says:

*πορνεία* cannot have meant infidelity within the realm of marriage, for in Matt. xv. 19 it is distinguished from *μοιχεία*. For St. Matthew infidelity between betrothal and marriage would have been adultery (*μοιχεία*), see l. 19. . . .

Two passages throw light on the word. In 1 Cor. v. 1 St. Paul denounces a heinous form of *πορνεία*, a man's marrying his father's widow. . . .

The Apostolic Decree of Acts xv. 29 promulgated a compromise by which Gentiles and Jews could share a common social life, and with it the Eucharist: the Jews were not to demand circumcision or the ceremonial law; the Gentiles were to abstain from meat sold at the butcher's which had played its part at a sacrifice, from meat at the killing of which the blood had not been properly drained, from "black-puddings" and other repellent ways of using the blood, and from "fornication" (*πορνεία*). . . . Since the first three articles of the compromise are concerned with practices innocent enough to the Gentiles, the fourth must be of a similar nature. The passage in 1 Corinthians gives us the clue. *πορνεία* here means marriage within the prohibited Levitical degrees. . . . But for a decade or two, especially in places like Antioch, where Jew and Gentile met and where the agitation which led to the decree arose, marriage within the prohibited degrees was a live issue, and *πορνεία* was the word by which it was known.

Turning to St. Matthew, the problem we have to account for is the obscuring of the plain rule of St. Mark by an exception which seems inconsistent with the teaching of Our Lord even in St. Matthew. If the foregoing argument holds, the reference is to the

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<sup>30</sup> F. F. Bruce, The Dawn of Christianity (London: The Paternoster Press, 1950), p. 43n.

local Syrian problem. One exception is allowed to the universal rule: when a man who has married within the prohibited degrees puts away his wife the word adultery is out of place. Rather the marriage is null. . . .

If this solution is correct, the famous excepting clause, so far from being a flaw in the Church's case, strengthens it. There is no divorce, but causes of nullity may be recognized.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, whichever explanation one adopts of Matthew's exception the conclusion is the same; i.e., Christ did not allow for divorce but placed marriage and the status of women on that ideal state of the Genesis narrative.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

We need now only to summarize the argument and examine the conclusions in a little more detail. The thesis was that Jesus announced a new and superior doctrine concerning marriage and divorce. To substantiate this it was shown that He went further in His teaching than the strictest Jews of His day. This involved proving that Jesus disallowed divorce altogether and dealing with the excepting clause of Matthew. It was demonstrated that all explanations led to the conclusion that divorce was disallowed. Although our Lord did not blame Moses for making the concession of divorce, He replaced the Jewish law with God's ideal.

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<sup>31</sup> W. K. Lowther Clarke, New Testament Problems (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1929), pp. 59-60.

What does all of this show about the status of women? Chiefly, it emphasizes the exalted and inviolable position of women as partners with their husbands in the service of Jesus. All of this is a wonderful prelude to the elaboration of this same emphasis in the epistles of the New Testament. It is unfortunate that writers are usually so concerned with the public ministry of women that they often overlook this revelation from the Founder of the Church that the starting place for a proper understanding of the status of women is in Genesis. Miss Bushnell, for instance, who is so very keen on liberating women, makes no use of Jesus' teaching on divorce, so intent is she on vindicating the public ministry of women.<sup>32</sup> If a permanent union in marriage until death was Jesus' ideal for women, then one would be forced to say that by His standards the status of women has been lowered in this day of increased divorce.

The perfect and permanent union in the image and likeness of God of man and woman who become one flesh (Gen. 2:24) and who are therefore equal and yet who are two persons and therefore different is the chief emphasis of our Lord's teaching in this section.<sup>33</sup> Specifically, this involves many features which will be dealt with in detail in later sections. Sufficient for the present purpose is Driver's excellent

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<sup>32</sup> Katherine C. Bushnell, God's Word to Women (Oakland: Author, 1923).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Lucklock, op. cit., pp. 1-3.

comment on the Genesis passage:

We have here a wonderfully conceived allegory, designed, by a most significant figure, to set forth the moral and social relation of the sexes to each other, the dependence of woman upon man, her close relationship to him, and the foundation existing in nature for the attachment springing up between them, and for the feelings with which each should naturally regard the other. The woman is formed out of the man's side: hence it is the wife's duty to be at hand, ready at all times to be a 'help' to her husband, it is the husband's natural duty ever to cherish and defend his wife, as part of his own self.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), pp. 42-43.

**PART II**

**THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH FROM  
PENTECOST TO THE END OF THE NEW TESTAMENT PERIOD  
AS REFLECTED IN THE CANONICAL LITERATURE**

## CHAPTER VI

### THE PLACE OF WOMEN IN THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH

Continuing in the path of activity and ministry which Jesus blazed, women found a large and important place in the founding and establishing of the church in various parts of the world. This important ministry, like that described in the chapter "Women as Ministers to Jesus," is usually not given its proper place when the ministry of women in the New Testament is considered. This doubtless stems from the fact that certain passages, mostly Pauline, generally take precedence in one's thoughts as well as from the fact that the references which concern women's place in the early missionary activity of the church are seldom considered together. To trace such references and to discover their significance is the purpose of this chapter.

The basis for this activity in the expansion of the church lies in the attitude of the Founder of Christianity toward women. This attitude, which has been elaborated in detail in the previous section, finds its codification in the Pauline dictum: "there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."<sup>1</sup> It should be re-emphasized that the naturalness of the Gospel accounts concerning women must not "deceive us into thinking that it was a very ordinary thing."<sup>2</sup> This revolutionary equalizing of men and women before God

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<sup>1</sup> Galatians 3:28.

<sup>2</sup> William Robinson, op. cit., p. 59.

which Jesus instituted carried forward into the early church and greatly aided it in its mission. Certainly it is true that:

no one who reads the New Testament attentively . . . can fail to notice that in the apostolic and sub-apostolic age women played an important role in the propaganda of Christianity and throughout the Christian communities.<sup>3</sup>

After the ascension, women were found in Jerusalem gathered with the Apostles and disciples in the upper room. Their activity was not domestic but was that of engaging in prayer along with the men who were gathered with them.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, there is no reason to believe that they were not included in praying for Judas' successor. Allworthy's observation about this is obvious but necessary.

Nothing can be more unlikely than that the mother of the Lord and the women with her were allowed to join in 'the prayer' generally and were asked to withdraw when the subject of the prayer was the selection of an apostle.<sup>5</sup>

Doubtless "the women" included those who were mentioned earlier as ministering to the Lord (Luke 8:2-3), and there is no reason to exclude them from the count of one hundred and twenty disciples.<sup>6</sup> Deissmann

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<sup>3</sup> Adolf Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (London: Williams and Norgate, 1908), II, 64.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 1:13-14.

<sup>5</sup> T. B. Allworthy, Women in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons, 1917), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 1:15.



has shown that ὄνομα here means "person" which would easily include persons of the female sex.<sup>7</sup>

Even if the use of ἀνὴρ in Acts 4:4 indicates that there were not many women converts in the first weeks of the life of the church in Jerusalem,<sup>8</sup> that condition did not remain long. After the death of Ananias and Sapphira "believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women,"<sup>9</sup> and by the time of the first scattering women are mentioned as particular objects of the persecution which must give some indication of their number.<sup>10</sup>

In another way Christian women came to the front in the church at Jerusalem in the person of Mary the mother of John Mark whose house furnished a meeting place for the church.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, it must have been an important meeting place for Peter to have made his way there after his release from prison, seemingly as a matter of course. Some believe that the upper room was in her house, and no less an authority than

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<sup>7</sup> G. Adolf Deissmann, Bible Studies (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1901), p. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Fenton John Anthony Hort, The Christian Ecclesia (London: Macmillan and Co., 1897), p. 229 who defines ecclesia as "the sum of all its male adult members."

<sup>9</sup> Acts 5:14.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 8:3.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 12:12.

Sanday says of this matter:

It seems to me that the combinations are quite legitimate, and only give unity and compactness to the history, if we suppose that the house of Mary and her son was the one central meeting-place of the Church of Jerusalem throughout the Apostolic Age.<sup>12</sup>

Incidentally, Mary and her servant Rhoda furnish examples of the appeal of the gospel to different classes of women, the one being wealthy enough to own a house and the other being of a servant class.

When the message reached Samaria, mention is made again of the women who received it and who were baptized along with the men. Surely they too were among those upon whom hands were laid by the Apostles and who received the gift of the Holy Spirit.<sup>13</sup> Even though the historical accuracy of the Acts may be questioned, such questioning does not substantially lessen the import of these references to women, for the totality of them certainly indicates that numbers of them were coming in to the full privilege of Christianity.

When the Christian mission came into Europe women continue to have a prominent place. The first European convert is reported to have been a woman named Lydia "a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira."<sup>14</sup> Because she is mentioned as the head of her household<sup>15</sup> she

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<sup>12</sup> W. Sanday, Sacred Sites of the Gospels (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1903), p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 8:12-17.

<sup>14</sup> Acts 16:14.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 16:40.

was probably a widow, and because of her occupation which required an amount of capital investment she was evidently a wealthy woman. Shortly after Lydia's conversion another woman, a damsel who was possessed, was healed and turned to Christianity. According to the story she was a slave girl.<sup>16</sup> Lightfoot sees in these two incidents illustrations of the two social revolutions which the gospel effected in the world. He comments:

In most modern treatises on civilisation, from whatever point of view they are written, a prominent place is given to the amelioration of women and the abolition of slavery, as the noblest social triumphs of Christianity. Now the woman and the slave are the principal figures in the scene of the Apostle's preaching at Philippi.<sup>17</sup>

It is not unlikely, too, that among the women who gathered with Lydia at the Proseucha and who were converted in the early days of the mission in Philippi were Euodia and Syntyche.<sup>18</sup> Lightfoot suggests that at the time of the writing of the Philippian letter they were deaconesses in that church,<sup>19</sup> while Harnack<sup>20</sup> and Vincent<sup>21</sup> both suggest

<sup>16</sup> Acts 16:16, 19.

<sup>17</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians (London: Macmillan and Co., 1896), p. 55.

<sup>18</sup> Philippians 4:2.

<sup>19</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>20</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 67.

<sup>21</sup> Marvin R. Vincent, Philippians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897, ICC), p. 130.

that two congregations met in their respective houses. (That they are both women is clear from the  $\alpha\upsilon\tau\alpha\iota\varsigma$  in Philippians 4:3). At any rate, they evidently held a place of honor and usefulness in the church, perhaps in evangelistic work<sup>22</sup> since they are said to have wrestled together with Paul in the gospel.

Both in Thessalonica and Berea it is said that honorable women were among the company of those who believed the Apostle's message.<sup>23</sup> Both Knowling<sup>24</sup> and Rackham<sup>25</sup> understand this to mean the wives of the leading citizens of the community which would lend support to Lightfoot's statement that the social position of women in Macedonia "was higher . . . than in most parts of the civilized world."<sup>26</sup> He goes on to say that:

The extant Macedonian inscriptions seem to assign to the sex a higher social influence than is common among the civilised nations of antiquity. In not a few instances a metronymic takes the place of the usual patronymic, and in other cases prominence is given to women which can hardly be accidental.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Richard Belward Rackham, The Acts of the Apostles (London: Methuen & Co., 1901), p. 284. Cf. Hebrews 10:32; 2 Timothy 2:5.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 17:4, 12.

<sup>24</sup> R. J. Knowling, The Acts of the Apostles (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900, Expositor's Greek Testament), II, 359.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., p. 295.

<sup>26</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

Although it is true in the light of this fact that:

A recognition of the comparatively high position of women in Macedonia and also in Asia Minor in the first century forbids us to make the exaggerated claim that progress in this direction was everywhere entirely due to the introduction of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

still the point of this chapter is unaffected; i.e., that in the founding and establishing of the church women had a large place.<sup>29</sup>

At Athens, where there seems to have been few results from St. Paul's preaching, one woman, Damaris, is named as a convert.<sup>30</sup> Ramsay makes the interesting conjecture of her that since she is not described as εὐσχημωρ (cf. Acts 13:50; 17:4, 12), and since at Athens no woman of a respectable position would have been present in St. Paul's audience, she may have been one of the hetairai.<sup>31</sup>

It is, however, in the story of the work at Corinth that one of the most interesting women of the New Testament is introduced. Priscilla along with her husband Aquila is mentioned six times in the New

<sup>28</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., pp. 69-70.

<sup>29</sup> Vincent (op. cit., p. 130) is not convinced that Lightfoot's estimation of the status of women in Macedonia is correct. However, although his arguments are not convincing, in either case it would be simply a question of how much change did Christianity bring to women in this particular part of the world. Evidently, it was not so revolutionary here as in other places.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 17:34.

<sup>31</sup> W. M. Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1893), p. 160.

Testament (in four of these instances her name stands first).<sup>32</sup> Although there can be little doubt that she was a woman of culture and education (cf. Acts 18:26), Priscilla's precedence of rank is due primarily to "her greater fervency of spirit or ability of character."<sup>33</sup> Her ability to instruct the cultured Greek Apollos is probably only one of the many ways in which she served the church. Harnack quite correctly remarks on the mention of her in 1 Corinthians 16:19:

This passage already mentions the wife along with the husband (although after him), which is noteworthy, for as a rule the husband alone is mentioned in such cases. The woman must therefore have been of some importance personally and in the church at their house. . . .<sup>34</sup>

One would certainly like to know the full details of her ministry and of her activity within the church in her home. She could hardly be excluded from the ranks of the teacher though under what circumstances she exercised that ministry--that is, publicly or privately--we do not know.

In addition to Priscilla and Aquila (and possibly Euodia and Syntyche), there is every likelihood that another woman ministered to the early church by offering her home as a meeting place for the

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<sup>32</sup> Acts 18:2, 18, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19.

<sup>33</sup> Knowling, op. cit., II, 384.

<sup>34</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 66.

assembly.<sup>35</sup> Although conceivably *Νύμφαν* may not be a feminine form, it probably is, and thus it furnishes another instance of the important place women had in the early days of the church.<sup>36</sup>

Other women who were prominent in the establishing of the church form a fairly lengthy list. Apphia shares in the address of the short letter to Philemon. Concerning this Moffatt has written:

This note is not strictly private. It is addressed not only to Philemon (primarily), but to Apphia his wife (*Ἀδελφή*, as often in this sense). Unless 2 Jn is addressed to an individual, this note is the only extant letter in the NT literature which is even partially addressed to a woman, although Phoebe had one written on her behalf.<sup>37</sup>

Allworthy does not understand her to be Philemon's wife but sees her as a prominent woman with some important ministry in the church.<sup>38</sup> One fears, however, that his conclusions are urged on by his desire to assign her a ministerial function in his effort to cite as many examples as possible of this nature from the New Testament. Oesterley takes a mediating view by declaring Apphia to be Philemon's wife and stating in addition, with great indefiniteness, that "she must have occupied also,

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<sup>35</sup> Colossians 4:15.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. James Hope Moulton, A Grammar of New Testament Greek (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1906), I, 48, where he shows how it could easily be a feminine form.

<sup>37</sup> James Moffatt, An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912), p. 164.

<sup>38</sup> Allworthy, op. cit., p. 119.



most likely, a quasi-official position in the church."<sup>39</sup> But whatever her precise ministry was or was not she was an important enough figure to be mentioned by the Apostle.

The address of the Second Epistle of John to ἐκλεκτῇ κυρίᾳ presents an example which is none too clear. Westcott thinks it is an insoluble problem,<sup>40</sup> while Harnack is emphatic in his statement that the epistle is addressed to a particular woman. He says:

A prominent position in some unknown church of Asia must also have been occupied by the woman to whom the second epistle of John was written. . . . She appears to have been distinguished for exceptional hospitality, and the author therefore warns her in a friendly way against receiving heretical itinerant teachers into her house.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, Streeter is just as certain that the address is not to a particular woman for these reasons:

The omission of the substantive ἐκκλησία (church) in the phrase ἡ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι συνεκλεκτή (she that is elect with you) in 1 Peter v. 13, and the absolute use of the feminine adjective ἐκλεκτή (elect) in Ignatius (Trall. i.), make it probable that the elect Lady is not a person but a church. This is further implied by the salutation in the last verse from 'the children of thine elect sister,' the 'elect sister' being obviously the church in which the author writes.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> W. E. Oesterley, The Epistle to Philemon (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900, Expositor's Greek Testament), IV, 211.

<sup>40</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, The Epistles of St John (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 224.

<sup>41</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 70.

<sup>42</sup> Burnett Hillman Streeter, The Primitive Church (London: Macmillan & Co., 1929), p. 83.



These reasons are very convincing, and therefore it would not be profitable to carry the discussion of this matter further, lest one fall into Allworthy's error.

Obviously from the quotation above, Streeter considers the salutation of 1 Peter 5:13 to be from a church and not from Peter's wife. Selwyn lends his support to this opinion by declaring:

συνεκλεκτῇ i.e. the Christian body in Rome, elect like the Christian communities of Asia Minor mentioned in the Address, i.l. Though St. Peter was married (Matt. viii. 14, 1 Cor. ix. 5), it is improbable that his wife is alluded to here. There is no difficulty in understanding ἐκκλησία; for the feminine adjective with the article is often used in Greek by itself, where the context makes the meaning obvious. . . . συνεκλεκτῇ is a natural echo of ἐκλεκτοῖς in i.l.<sup>43</sup>

Although St. Peter's wife was named among the martyrs<sup>44</sup> and although she may have had an active ministry along with her husband, there is no conclusive evidence from this passage to that effect.

There is no question, however, about the prominence of women mentioned in the greetings which are recorded in the last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans. Though there is question as to whether these women were connected with the church at Rome or at Ephesus,<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (London: Macmillan & Co., 1946), pp. 243-44.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Clement of Alexandria, Stromata, VII, chapter 11.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 536 who holds the destination was Rome, and C. H. Dodd, The Epistle to the Romans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932, MNTC), pp. xvii-xxiv who prefers the Roman destination but who states concisely the arguments for both views.

the fact that eight women are named among the twenty-six persons specifically mentioned certainly shows their prominence in the work of the early church. The question, however, which one wishes could be answered fully is, What kind of work did they do? The case of Phoebe, which will be considered fully in another chapter, furnishes part of the answer to this question. In the passage under discussion, Priscilla is called a *συνεργός* of Paul's (vs. 3). Quite probably the reference is merely to help she gave the Church by furnishing a meeting place for a local group and to whatever private instruction she may have given from time to time to Apollos and others. However, it is admittedly true that it would be difficult to prove conclusively that one could not also conceive of this term's including missionary work and even public teaching. If this were the case, however, one would expect mention of it elsewhere in the New Testament references to Priscilla.

Mary, mentioned in verse six, evidently performed a personal ministry toward Paul like that of the women who ministered to Christ during His life. The question of verse seven arises from the determination of the gender of the accusative form *Ἰουλίαν*. It might be from *Ἰουλίᾱς* (masculine) or from *Ἰουλίᾱ* (feminine). Some are afraid to understand this as a feminine form since that would mean that a woman was "of note among the apostles." However, the phrase *ἐπίσημοι ἐν τοῖς ἀποστόλοις* may not only mean "distinguished as apostles" but also "well-known to the apostles." Thus, before one could assert that the reference is definitely to a woman apostle one would have to be

assured of the feminine nominative from the ambiguous accusative and of the meaning of ἐπίσημοι. Even if one did make these assertions he could hardly feel that his conclusions were very certain.<sup>46</sup>

The only other person in this list requiring a word of comment is the mother of Rufus (vs. 13), whom Paul calls "his mother." Probably this means no more than "that this matron--whoever she may have been--had at some time shown him motherly kindness, which he had requited with filial affection."<sup>47</sup>

Surely all these references bear out the truth of Knowling's words:

St. Paul has sometimes been accused of a want of due respect towards women. This last chapter of his Epistle to the Romans is sufficient in itself to refute such a charge. From the beginning to the end, the writer chooses with the most apt consideration the title and the merit which belongs to each member of the household of God, and recognizes the special work which a woman, and often only a woman, can do in the Church.<sup>48</sup>

Thus in the early propagation of the Christian message women played a significant role. The number of times specific women are mentioned in the accounts of the founding of the various churches is in

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<sup>46</sup> A good discussion of this question will be found in James Denney, St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900, Expositor's Greek Testament), II, 719.

<sup>47</sup> Alice Gardner, "St. Paul and Women," The Ministry of Women, p. 43.

<sup>48</sup> R. J. Knowling, The Testimony of St. Paul to Christ (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p. 466.

itself striking. In many places it was the woman's home in which the church met. Priscilla, Apphia, Euodia, and Syntyche were doubtless leaders in their respective assemblies. Mary, Rufus' mother, and others succoured the church with a quieter ministry, and women came in large numbers and with full privileges of position into the church from its very beginning. That they played an important role is beyond question.

But, it must be added, to say that women played a leading role is another matter. The Incarnation was in a man; the apostles were all men; the chief missionary activity was done by men; the writing of the New Testament was the work of men; and, in general, the leadership of the churches was entrusted to men. Nevertheless, a prominence and dignity which women did not have either in Judaism or the heathen world came to them in the early propagation and expansion of the Christian church, and the history and record of it would be immeasurably poorer without this prominence, secondary though it was.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DOMESTIC STATUS OF WOMEN

Further evidence regarding the status of women in the early years of the Christian era is to be found in the New Testament writers' discussions of matters related to marriage, celibacy, divorce, and the home. Three such discussions are pertinent to this chapter: Paul's answer to questions sent to him concerning marriage by the church at Corinth,<sup>1</sup> the husband-wife relationship which is propounded in the epistle commonly known as Ephesians,<sup>2</sup> and St. Peter's discussion of proper demeanor and deportment for women.<sup>3</sup> None of these passages is without difficulties, some of which are relevant to this thesis and some of which are not. An historian must report the facts; in addition, he will also want to inquire into the causes which helped shape the facts; finally, he will at least pose the question to his readers, What relevance and application do these matters have in society today? Along these lines the procedure of this chapter will move.

#### I. MARRIAGE, CELIBACY, AND RELATED MATTERS

Chief among the characteristics of the city of Corinth in St. Paul's day was that it was a city of pleasure. Its position on the

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ephesians 5:22-33.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Peter 3:1-7.

cross-roads of trade routes both North and South and East and West made it in very reality a cosmopolitan city and contributed to its immorality. That immorality, however, was not only that which comes to a cosmopolitan city because of its very nature but it was also immorality which had a religious sanction. Corinth was full of prostitutes attached to the worship of Aphrodite.

Thousands of courtesans were attached to her temple. The worship of Aphrodite at Corinth was, like the worship of Artemis at Ephesus, an Eastern worship under a Greek name. What must have been the condition of a city, where such was the religion? . . . Corinth was the chosen resort of the vicious. A "Corinthian," . . . was a synonym for a man of pleasure. . . . Indeed, sexual vice was there almost a matter of course. . . . To avoid the company of the vicious would be absolutely to go out of the world (1 Cor. v. 9, 10).<sup>4</sup>

Such an environment would quite naturally affect the mind of the church at Corinth. If the Corinthian Christians "were found to maintain that fornication was just as much a thing indifferent as the kind of food that was eaten (vi. 12-14),"<sup>5</sup> it is not surprising to find that problems arose in their minds in connection with the marriage relation. As has been shown, the Jews attached a high value to marriage, but other tendencies were at work in the early church, all of which gave rise to the questions sent to Paul concerning these matters. In considering his answer, which comprises the whole seventh chapter of the first epistle, certain general factors must be kept in mind. No copy

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<sup>4</sup> H. L. Goudge, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: Methuen & Co., 1903), pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. xvi.

of the questions which occasioned this reply exists. We are very definitely reading one side of a correspondence or, so to speak, listening to one side of a telephone conversation. In addition, the Apostle himself states that some of his remarks, at least, are given for a specific emergency (cf. vs. 26), the full details of which are not available to us. Further, it is plainly evident that he is not writing a full treatise on marriage or even discussing the characteristics of the ideal married life. "The local impress and temporary aim of the directions here given on the subject of marriage must be borne in mind; otherwise Paul's treatment will appear to be narrow and unsympathetic. . . ."<sup>6</sup> A number of points bearing on the status of women are clear even from this limited treatment.

The first fact that is clear is that Paul does not say anything that would give the idea that he shared the view that marriage was to be avoided because it was polluting or evil in itself (vs. 2, 28). Some in the church were evidently urging not only the prohibition of debauchery but also all sexual relations, even those within the sphere of legal marriage. Why would such an idea have arisen? Dobschutz answers well in the following summary statement:

To understand this line of thought, we must clearly realise that the ancient world as a whole saw something supernatural, something demoniacal in the act of generation. Sometimes it was deified--as in the Phrygian cults, the cult of the Phoenician Astarte, and the

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<sup>6</sup> G. G. Findlay, First Corinthians (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1900, Expositor's Greek Testament), II, 822.



Aphrodite cults influenced by it; sometimes it was held on this very ground to be pollution. The idea of the Mosaic law that copulation causes one day's levitical pollution was widely spread in heathendom. . . . It is quite conceivable that this idea found support in the young Christian community of this city of excesses. In view of the immorality dominant in heathendom, and the ceremonial fostering which it received, every earnest moral movement was constrained to urge the other extreme of perfect abstinence within as well as without the marriage state, the renunciation of marital relations, and a vow of chastity on the part of the single.<sup>7</sup>

It may not be unlikely also that there was an eschatological factor which entered into this tendency to prohibit normal relations between married people. There is no doubt that the Corinthians believed that the parousia was very near and to those who thought thus the birth of children would be quite unnecessary.

In his treatment of this matter Paul makes it perfectly clear that there is nothing impure about marriage; rather, that it is desirable in the cases of those who lived in Corinth *ὅτι τὰς πορνείας* (vs. 2). His advice is to continue normal relations since another course might be dangerous. Furthermore, suspension of sexual relations must not take place without mutual consent, only for a spiritual purpose, and only for a temporary period of time (vs. 5).

The second evident fact is that in this chapter Paul speaks of equality of relationship in marriage. That equality (vs. 3,4) to be sure is restricted to the things of sex, but it is nevertheless a Pauline dictum of equality which is seldom mentioned. Commenting on these

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<sup>7</sup> Ernst von Dobschütz, Christian Life in the Primitive Church (London: Williams & Norgate, 1904), p. 40.



verses, which Bengel calls "an elegant paradox,"<sup>8</sup> Findlay says:

Within the bonds of wedlock, "the due" should be yielded (3) by each for the satisfaction and according to the rights of the other (4). This dictum defends marital intercourse against rigorists, as that of ver. 1 commends celibacy against sensualists. The word ὁφείλη guards, both positively and negatively, the κοίτη ἀμείαντος (Heb. xiii. 4); what is due to one alone must be given to one alone (τῇ γυναικί, τῷ ἀνδρί). . . . The precise repetition of ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ corrects the onesidedness of common sentiment and of public law,--both Greek and Jewish: she is as much the mistress of his person, as he the master of hers.<sup>9</sup>

T. W. Manson has noticed this Pauline equality note and traces the influences of it back to Jesus. He says:

He [Paul] is equally clearly engaged in an internal conflict between his inherited conviction that the husband has the last word and the new principle, which I think goes back to Jesus himself, that husband and wife in marriage meet on a footing of real equality.<sup>10</sup>

However, it should be reemphasized that in this context the equality is limited to one aspect of married life although it may be indicative of a mental struggle with his Jewish background which, according to his word in Ephesians, he was never able to overcome.

The third outstanding fact in the chapter and growing out of the first two is that Christian standards gave place to no extra-marital relationships. Beyond all question this elevated the status of women

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<sup>8</sup> John Albert Bengel, Gnomon of the New Testament (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1857), III, 244.

<sup>9</sup> Findlay, op. cit., II, 823.

<sup>10</sup> T. W. Manson, "St. Paul in Ephesus," Bulletin of the John Rylands Library (Manchester: Manchester University Press, Vol. 26, No. 1, Oct.-Nov. 1941), p. 110.

above that which they had in the Greek world. This has already been spoken of in the introductory section, but Dobschütz' summary word is not inappropriate here.

We are accustomed (or ought to be) to look upon adultery and fornication as equally sinful. The Grecian world of that time had quite another view. The respectable wife of a citizen brought up in strict seclusion remained shut up in her special apartments almost like an oriental, and in her case adultery hardly ever occurred. But on the streets hetairae were continually moving about in crowds, and they practised unchastity as "hierodules" in the service of a heathen temple. A man's intercourse with them, whether he was married or unmarried, was hardly reckoned any offence at all. In addition to this we must add the specific vice of that age, the sodomy, which had eaten its way so far into human thought as to have found philosophical justification. All this Christianity opposed with an inexorable "Thou shalt not commit adultery." But its insistence on moral purity met among the Christians of Corinth with the most vigorous opposition.<sup>11</sup>

The fourth pertinent fact is that celibacy is given preference over marriage.

For I would that all men were even as I myself. (vs. 7)

I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. (vs. 8)

Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. (vs. 27)

But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none. (vs. 29)

But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. (vs. 32,33)

So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better. (vs. 38)

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<sup>11</sup> Dobschütz, op. cit., p. 44.

But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment. (vs. 40)

Whether or not Paul was ever married is not known, but plainly he was not married when he wrote these words, and he considered the celibate life a *χάρισμα*. What reasons may be assigned for this preference? One reason has been suggested; i.e., that it was a reaction from the immorality so dominant in heathendom. A second reason may be found in Christ's own teaching which, known to these Christians, contributed to this preference for celibacy. He said: "But woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days!"<sup>12</sup> Two other reasons are suggested by Paul himself in his discussion of this matter. One is eschatological, for he declares that the time is short and even those who are married should be as though they were not--not, however, withdrawing from the world, but using it with the consciousness that it will soon pass away.<sup>13</sup> This eschatological motive is not unique in this passage. Dodd has well said:

If one has been making a stay, mentally, in the Hellenistic world of the first century, and then comes back to the New Testament, there is nothing in the latter which gives one a greater sense of strangeness than the language which its writers use about . . . [things] which are generally comprehended under the term "eschatology." The implication of all such language is that the writers believed themselves to be living in a unique period of the world's history, when portentous events were in process in which they themselves were involved, unprecedented in previous history and leading up to an almost unimaginable climax. This belief was uncongenial to much of the best religious thought of the first century, and it

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<sup>12</sup> Mark 13:17.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:29-31.

is uncongenial to a great deal of modern thought; but it pervades most of the New Testament in one form or another, and its influence on ethical ideas must have been considerable.<sup>14</sup>

Although there is no doubt that the early Christians did not fully understand all that was involved, their sense of the impact of the other world and of the shortness of time threw present life into a new light. This word about celibacy is one of the best examples of that principle operating, for

. . . where the sense of impending catastrophe was strong, everything in this world seemed temporary and provisional; only things which would survive the passing of heaven and earth were worthy of attention.<sup>15</sup>

Married life, of course, was not one of those things (cf. Mark 12:25).

How did this affect the status of women? Though this preference for celibacy was not asceticism and certainly Paul can not be accused of being an ascetic in the sense of one who withdraws from the world, yet this was no doubt a precursor of later asceticism which gave women in one sense a more exalted place. One can easily see beginnings of this in the New Testament, for it is not a big step from the preference for celibacy in 1 Corinthians to the prominence of widows in the Pastoral Epistles. And then it is an easy step for the rise of orders of virgins and deaconesses. But whether this was a God-ordained exaltation is another question, for, as we shall see, when the expectation of

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<sup>14</sup> C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1951), pp. 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

an immediate end of the world faded, it is woman's place in the home which is exalted, and even in Paul, as has been pointed out, there is the constant tension between these two ideas. Another writer, a woman, has made similar observations which are worth quoting.

But if Paul was neither erotic nor domestic in temperament, it must be insisted on that he was by no means ascetic. There was a good deal of asceticism in the air during his time, both in Jewish sects and in pagan schools. . . . He was far removed from the intolerant hatred of matter as such and impatience of the necessities of material life which marked the Therapeutae and Essenes and the hermits of the Egyptian plains. Asceticism has commonly a twofold effect on the position of women--of exaltation and of depression.<sup>16</sup>

This third reason, eschatology, suggested for the preference of celibacy, then, tended to exalt woman's status by giving her an independence and comradeship in Christian work.

The fourth factor, and probably the most important in Paul's own mind, is the reason of the Lord's work.<sup>17</sup> The reason for suggesting that this was uppermost in Paul's mind is that even his eschatological motives are preeminently practical. That the time is short means that the work is urgent, and it is the work that is of primary importance. Therefore, if more work can be accomplished by a single person, then celibacy is certainly to be preferred. If the time is short then it is the more to be preferred. But even removing the eschatological factor, the motive of the Lord's work is unaffected.

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<sup>16</sup> Alice Gardner, "St. Paul and Women," The Ministry of Women, p. 44.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:32-35.

There is no reason why this last motive is not valid today, and this would forbid our writing off the entire teaching of this chapter as an interim ethic. There is no doubt that many things in it were of an interim nature, but the emphasis on serving the Lord without distraction is valid as long as there is Christian work to be done. Its application today, then, is this:

If a person wishes to abstain from marriage that he may wholly devote himself to the work of the Lord, he must have these qualifications: steadfastness of purpose, freedom from any carnal obligations to marry, freedom from civil restraints, a genuine desire in his inmost heart as opposed to the promptings of another. Whoever abstains from domestic joys and sorrows in order to serve the Lord without distraction, and does not infringe any of these conditions, not only does not sin, but even does well.<sup>18</sup>

As to its first century application, this certainly implies that women may be engaged in the Lord's work with a certain equality with men, for throughout these verses Paul not only carefully balances the terms used in connection with husbands and wives but also in connection with the unmarried man and the virgin (cf. vs. 32, 34). The unmarried woman in Judaism was a reproach; the unmarried woman in ancient Greece was likely to be a woman of the street; an unmarried woman in Christianity could be an independent and wholly dedicated servant of her Lord.

Returning to the discussion of the chapter as a whole, the fifth outstanding factor in it is the disallowance of divorce. It has been shown that our Lord's teaching did not allow divorce and that this was

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<sup>18</sup> Thomas Charles Edwards, The First Epistle to the Corinthians (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1885), p. 202.



an advance over the best even in Judaism not to mention the practice of the Greeks and Romans. In the case of married Christians (vs. 10-11) divorce is clearly not allowed. "Had S. Paul held that adultery dissolved marriage or made its dissolution permissible, thus leaving either one or both parties free to contract a fresh union, would he not have said so?"<sup>19</sup> In this Paul sees himself as following exactly the teaching of Christ (vs. 10). In the cases of spiritually mixed marriages the problems are more complex, but Paul's advice is that the believer is not to seek divorce, yet if the unbeliever insists upon it the believer cannot refuse. Nowhere, however, in such cases does Paul imply that the believer is free to marry again. Remarriage is allowed only in the case of death (vs. 39). These standards are certainly superior to the best in heathen circles of the day in giving protection and rights to women. Furthermore, a genuine love and concern in marriage, which was not found among heathens, is assumed in Christian marriage even though it be a spiritually mixed one.

The sixth matter in this chapter concerns virgins. There are two principal interpretations of these verses (36-38) concerning virgins. One sees simply a father-daughter relationship in which the father exercises moral judgment and authority over the marriageability of his daughter.<sup>20</sup> The most important thing to notice is this matter of

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<sup>19</sup> Goudge, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Findlay, op. cit., II, 836.

parental control. Not only is the father evidently the head of the Christian household, but he also is granted by Paul rather drastic control over the lives of his children. The second interpretation sees here the beginnings of an order of virgins.<sup>21</sup> It is very difficult to see even the rudiments of an order here, for this element of parental control is too great and contradictory to any sort of voluntary consecration on the part of a virgin. However, this may have been the forerunner of a rudimentary organization especially if many Christian fathers determined that their daughters should not marry. Some, continuing this line of interpretation, see here the same sort of "spiritual marriage" which is found being practiced in the days of Cyprian. This view is described thus:

. . . 1 Co 7:36 refers to the awakening love between a Christian householder and a young girl residing in his house, who are bound by a common vow; the Apostle recommends that an end be put to the precarious situation by marriage. But, on the other hand, in v. 37 he praises the Christian who, in the like situation, understands how to control himself; while v. 38 unites both decisions. The matter, then, does not concern father and daughter, as has generally been held by exegetes, but is a case of spiritual marriage. . . . What was inevitable took place at Corinth . . . viz. that the peculiar relation between the guardian and his spiritual bride became too intimate to be endurable for any length of time. . . . The present writer finds it more in accordance with the wording of the text (cf. the repeated *γαμίζω*) and also with the supposed situation, to think that he advised the young woman to leave the house and be married to some other Christian. If the words of St.

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. Harnack, *op. cit.*, II, 71-72 and Goudge, *op. cit.*, p. 62.



Paul have a concrete case of Syneisaktism in view . . . that is almost the only conceivable solution.<sup>22</sup>

It seems highly conjectural that Paul actually had such cases in view when he wrote this though this may have been a forerunner of the beginnings of syneisaktoi. However, here it seems simply to be a word addressed to fathers regarding their daughters, which for our purposes is important in showing how much they were controlled in Christian homes.

Concerning marriage, celibacy, and related matters then it has been shown that St. Paul did not have any idea that marriage was in itself evil (cf. Heb. 13:4); that in the rights of each partner in marriage over the other there was equality; that Christianity would not countenance any extra-marital relations; celibacy is preferred because of the shortness of the time and because of the work to be done (which latter reason only would apply today, the former being an interim ethic); that divorce between Christians is disallowed; and that virgin daughters come under strict control of their parents. Certain of these reveal at once a superior position for women in Christianity; in fact all but the last (concerning virgins) tended in one way or another to elevate the status of women.

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<sup>22</sup> H. Achelis, "Agapetae," Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1908), I, 179.

## II. HUSBAND-WIFE RELATIONSHIP

Two matters of introduction must be mentioned before one can deal with the passage in Ephesians five which treats of the relationship of husband and wife. One concerns the Pauline authorship of this epistle. "Ephesians still lies under grave suspicion, but probably more critics would now be prepared to accept it than some years ago."<sup>23</sup> Klausner gives convincing arguments for aligning oneself with those who do accept the Pauline authorship. Summarizing those arguments, he declares:

For, in the last analysis Ephesians contains genuine Pauline ideas. Perhaps the Epistle received in the course of time an incorrect address. . . ; or it may have been a "circular letter" to various churches whose members Paul did not know personally; the Ephesians may have somehow received the letter, and may have copied it, so that by chance their name became attached to it. These possibilities are no harder to imagine than it is to suppose that some forger, a disciple of Paul, so immersed himself in the study of the Epistle to the Colossians that he learned to write in the idiom of Paul. . . .<sup>24</sup>

Even accepting the Pauline authorship of the epistle does not settle another important question in connection with it, the question of the date of writing. This, of course, is linked with the question of the place of composition and is important to this discussion in order to ascertain whether the ideas in the letter represent an earlier or

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<sup>23</sup> C. H. Dodd, The Mind of Paul: Change and Development (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1934), p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Klausner, From Jesus to Paul (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1944), p. 243.

later period in the life of Paul. Again it is Dodd who argues convincingly for the later period. To treat his entire discussion would not be in order, but his conclusion is as follows:

But the Ephesian hypothesis is the most serious challenge that has been offered to the generally accepted view of the chronological order of the Pauline corpus. It has not, I think, been thoroughly discussed in English literature of the subject, but one meets with a widespread vague idea that there is "something in it." This can lead only to a blurring of the outlines of our picture of Paul's career. Either it is true, and we must adjust our view of Paul's career to it, or it is false. If, as I have tried to show, it cannot stand critical examination, then we may with some confidence assume that the captivity epistles represent the latest stage of Paul's literary activity, as it is known to us.<sup>25</sup>

First Peter, which in chapter three contains another important discussion of husband-wife relationship, has also been denied apostolic

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<sup>25</sup> Dodd, The Mind of Paul: Change and Development, p. 26. For the entire discussion see pp. 5-26. C. Leslie Mitton, The Epistle to the Ephesians (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1951), states the case against Pauline authorship and as one of the arguments uses the teaching of the Epistle concerning marriage. He says, "If the different attitudes toward the Second Coming can be reconciled as representing an earlier and a later stage in Paul's own experience, so probably can this change of attitude toward marriage. But many feel that the change is so great as to point to a different author rather than to a later phase in the life of the same author" (pp. 22-23). Although he dates the Epistle a generation after Paul, i.e., 87-92 A. D. (p. 261), he admits that "it faithfully represents the Pauline message, edited a little to make it immediately intelligible and applicable to the time for which it was prepared, but so true to the spirit of Paul and his insight into the Gospel that it has deservedly been regarded as the quintessence of Paulinism" (pp. 268-69). Accepting Mitton's views would not alter the content of the following paragraphs, except that it would mean that the date of the emergence of these ideas would have to be placed later.

authorship.<sup>26</sup> Although establishing apostolic authorship in the case of First Peter is not so necessary as in the case of Ephesians (for in the latter instance it is related to the comparison of Pauline ideas in 1 Corinthians), one may refer to Selwyn's commentary where the case for Petrine authorship is put as well as it has ever been put in English.<sup>27</sup> More particularly relevant is his suggestion concerning the similarities between Paul and Peter in the ethical sections; i.e., that such similarities are to be accounted for by the common use of some primitive Christian catechism which was at the disposal of all the early apostolic preachers.<sup>28</sup> The date of writing of the epistle would be about the same as that of Ephesians if we adopt the Petrine authorship

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<sup>26</sup> Streeter, The Primitive Church, p. 118.

<sup>27</sup> Edward Gordon Selwyn, The First Epistle of Saint Peter (London: Macmillan & Co., 1946), pp. 7-38.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., Essay II, pp. 363-466. "We conclude that . . . the New Testament authors were all writing on the basis of a catechetical pattern well known to their writers, and were developing it, each in his own way. The subjection of wives to their own husbands was certainly in the pattern, and it is probably enough that the pattern also included references to the need of conciliating public opinion and to modesty in woman's dress. In this case, however, it is St. Paul, not St. Peter, who develops the ethical theme into a great utterance of Christian theology, finding in the unity of man and wife and in the exclusiveness of their relationship a symbol of the unity between Christ and the Church. Though he starts from the duty of wives to be subject to their husbands, his interest does not lie there: it is simply a text for his inspired teaching on the mysterious interrelationship between God and man--a relationship fully reciprocal on either side, and deeply spiritual--which Christ has brought into being in the Church," p. 435.

of the former and the Pauline authorship in the Roman captivity of the latter.

Two ideas dominate these passages. One is the distinctively Christian ideal that love is the chief ingredient of marriage. Paul elevates this love to a sacramental level saying, "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it."<sup>29</sup> Peter, speaking along similar lines, adds two reasons for expecting such love.

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.<sup>30</sup>

Peter makes it very clear that the spiritual privileges of male and female are the same, but at the same time he recognizes that there is a physical difference between the two sexes. A standard for love like this was certainly not to be found in Greek society, and because of its comparison of Christian love with the self-sacrificing love of Christ and insistence on monogamy this surpasses even the high standards of Judaism. Dodd sees in this a development in the mind of Paul. He says:

In Ephesians we have a still more remarkable development of the teaching on marriage (v. 21-23). Here the love of husband and wife becomes a *μυστήριον*, a sacrament, of the love of Christ and the Church. That is to say, the marriage relation, which in I Cor. vii

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<sup>29</sup> Ephesians 5:25.

<sup>30</sup> 1 Peter 3:7.

was regarded as irrelevant to the Christian life, is made the vehicle of the highest conceivable spiritual values. It is clearly impossible at the same time to follow the two maxims: "Let those who have wives be as though they had none," and "Love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for it." This radical contradiction has been taken as one reason for denying the Pauline authorship of this epistle. But it lies in the line of development which we have traced. . . . If we are prepared to recognize a development, then the teaching of Ephesians represents on this side the climax of that development.<sup>31</sup>

One feels, however, that emphasis might be given not only as Dodd does to the development in Paul's thinking but also to the "present distress" for which the instructions of 1 Corinthians were written. After all, it is in that same epistle to the Corinthians that the great section on love appears.

The other dominant idea in these two passages is that of the subordination of the wife to the husband. Paul gives the reason for this submission as the headship of the husband, and Peter adds by way of commendation the example of Sarah who obeyed Abraham calling him Lord. Possibly the necessity for this teaching developed just because of the emancipation which Christianity brought to women. Harnack seems to suggest that when he says, "The apostle insists that wives are to be subject to their husbands, and the injunction becomes doubly intelligible when we observe how natural it was for Christian women to strike out on a line of their own."<sup>32</sup> Was it, then, a retreat from the

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<sup>31</sup> Dodd, The Mind of Paul: Change and Development, p. 35.

<sup>32</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 67-68.



initial freedom which Christianity brought? What was the nature of this subordination? How does it affect the status of women? These are the difficult questions which present themselves. There is scarcely any evidence on which to base an answer to the question of whether this teaching on subordination came as a development in the first century. If this formed a part of an early catechism then it had made its appearance very early in the Christian church, and very likely it developed early in order to safeguard the freedom given to women. The meaning of subordination and its effect on the status of women, however, is more clearly seen. One feels that another has written with such sane balance and insight on these questions that his words, though lengthy, will be quoted in answer to these questions.

Subordination is entirely different from subjection or inferiority. St. Paul's doctrine as to the position of women is a doctrine of their subordination within the family, and not of their inferiority, or of their subjection. . . . There is something slavish about [the associations of the word subjection], something which seems to speak of an inferior race held down by a stronger. But St. Paul's view of women is not this. He does not hold that women as a class are to be subject to men as a class, or that each individual woman is to be subordinate to each individual man with whom she comes into contact; what he holds is that each woman should be subordinate to her own husband or to the head of her family. Now subordination is one thing, and inferiority is altogether another. . . . How can a Christian ever be guilty of confusing subordination with inferiority? What did his Lord and Master but take "the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men," and become "obedient even unto death" not only to His Father in heaven, but to Joseph and Mary in their place, and even to those "meaner miserable," the rulers of His day? Did He regard Himself as inferior because He was subordinate? . . .

What then exactly is St. Paul's fundamental teaching on the question before us? He holds that within the Church, as well as without it, woman is meant to render obedience to her husband. She is to render it, not because she is inferior, but because he is

under the Lord her appointed head. . . . The Apostle's point is that the principle of subordination prevails everywhere, and runs up into the life of heaven itself.<sup>33</sup>

In domestic relationship, then, God has appointed an order which places man as the head and the wife in a place of honor though a place of subordination.

One further fact must be mentioned in this consideration. Although some of the teaching of 1 Corinthians 7 is an interim ethic, this teaching of subordination definitely is not, for it is based not on the "present distress" but upon the eternal headship of Christ over the church. It has been well said:

His teaching about the place and work of women, right or wrong, is based upon unalterable facts. It is rather to be compared with his teaching about parents and children than with that about masters and slaves. So long as the race continues, men must be men and women must be women, and it is upon this truth that St. Paul rests when he asserts that women are to be "subject," however quaint and rabbinic may sometimes be the illustrations by which he enforces the assertion.<sup>34</sup>

And since the purpose of this thesis is to discover the status of women in the life of the church in the first three centuries, it is important to recognize this fact, for whether one likes it or not, the early church evidently considered the subordination of the wife in domestic relations as the normal and fixed status and fixed upon unalterable

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<sup>33</sup> Canon Goudge, "The Teaching of St. Paul as to the Position of Women," The Place of Women in the Church (London: Robert Scott, 1917), pp. 45-48.

<sup>34</sup> A. J. Mason, "The Ministries of Women in the New Testament," The Ministry of Women, p. 38.



facts. Yet, though it was the status of subordination, let it never be forgotten that it also was the status of honor as the loved one in the home.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN RELIGIOUS LIFE

Having seen the important though secondary place which women played in the founding of the church and having shown that their position in domestic affairs was one of subordination to the man though not inferiority, there remains now the task of considering the precise role which they had in the public, official, spiritual life of the Christian community.

The natural place to begin such a discussion is with St. Paul's great assertion of the oneness in the body of Christ. Although this principle is announced in several places in his writings,<sup>1</sup> it is only in the Galatian letter that it is applied to the relation of men and women. There he writes:

For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Paul's meaning surely is clear: "in Him the old differences of race and sex and status have lost their power to sever us."<sup>3</sup> He is speaking of the unity of all Christians in the body of the risen Lord. In such a unity there is no difference nor can there be any difference even in

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<sup>1</sup> Romans 10:12; 1 Corinthians 12:13; Colossians 3:11.

<sup>2</sup> Galatians 3:26-28.

<sup>3</sup> Goudge, "The Teaching of St. Paul as to the Position of Women," The Place of Women in the Church, p. 39.

the status of male and female. The spiritual privileges in the body of Christ come equally to men and women.

This basic equality of status, when that is understood to mean spiritual privilege, is illustrated by comparing the initiatory rites of the old and new covenants: that is, by comparing circumcision with baptism. Though the origin of circumcision is obscure, it being likely that its native home was in Egypt, in Judaism, generally, it "is to be regarded as a ritual tribal mark."<sup>4</sup> It was performed in antiquity on all male children and slaves whether born in the house or brought in from abroad (cf. Gen. 17:22-27). In the period after the exile, the rite acquired a rather different position from that which it had previously held.

As substitutes for the sacrificial worship, no longer possible, the sabbath and circumcision became the cardinal commands of Judaism, and the chief symbols of the religion of Yahwe and of membership of the religious commonwealth.<sup>5</sup>

In the Hellenistic period its importance was further strengthened by the action of anti-national Jews who attempted to undo their circumcision. As a consequence the Rabbis instituted the Peri'ah (the laying bare of the glans) without which circumcision was invalid. The important fact to notice is that this was done in order to prevent any subsequent obliteration of the seal of the covenant, and great importance

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<sup>4</sup> Immanuel Benzinger, "Circumcision," Encyclopaedia Biblica (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), I, 831.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., pp. 832-33.

was placed on the shedding of a drop of blood as a sign of the covenant when a child was initiated into Judaism.<sup>6</sup> It has been shown that Judaism in contrast to heathen religions did include women and children in the community relationship to God. They are specifically mentioned in the accounts of the institution of the covenant. But the particular sign of the covenant and the special symbol for entrance into the community of Yahwe was circumcision which was of course limited to the males in the community. Surely this helped to emphasize the superior position which men held in Judaism.

Christian baptism was considered by the early church to be analogous to circumcision in the Christian ritual, but this rite of baptism which brings people into the Christian community is something which can be performed on men and women alike. Thus Christianity's initiatory ordinance illustrates the principle of unity in the body of Christ in which there is "neither male nor female," and emphasizes the superiority in this matter of Christianity over Judaism in which there was male and female. (It might be suggested that this may have bearing on the reason why the phrase "neither male nor female" appears only in the Galatian enunciation of this principle where Judaizing influences were tending to set up again the old distinctions.)

Even though there is equal privilege in the body of Christ for men and women because there is an absolute unity, this principle of

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<sup>6</sup> Shabbath, 135-137b.

unity "in no case involves a bare and barren uniformity of position, by which all previous differences pass away."<sup>7</sup> Unity of position does not mean necessarily uniformity in practice. This is clear from the context of the passage. As Goudge says:

But in no case did St. Paul teach that within the Church the difference must pass away. . . . [He did not teach] that within the Church there could be neither slave-owners nor slaves. His sympathy with the slave is plain in the Epistle to Philemon; doubtless he would have wished that all slaves might become free. But he never for a moment suggests that such a change is either possible or desirable under the existing circumstances of his day, and he regards it as of great importance that slaves should not bring discredit upon the Church by lack of respect and obedience to their masters.<sup>8</sup>

Thus to quote St. Paul's words as meaning that no subordination of women can exist is to misunderstand his meaning. Clearly, if this were true then it would mean that there likewise could be no subordination of men to men which would contradict all principles of church organization. Even Bishop Lightfoot, whose comment on this principle is so often misconstrued to mean that women can be allowed to do any sort of work in the Church, recognized that unity does not mean uniformity, for his comment limits women's work to be done for other women. He says: "It is His call to you--you women-workers--to do a sister's part to these your sisters."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Goudge, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Sermons Preached on Special Occasions (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), p. 222.

It is clear, then, that Paul's words that in Christ there is neither male nor female include nothing inconsistent with the idea of a difference in position and function of men and women. In themselves, the words do not suggest what differences may exist, but at the same time they do not deny that they do exist. That the church considered the spiritual rights of women in the body of Christ to be equal with those of men is undeniable; what the church considered to be the duties of women functioning within that body is the subject of investigation in the remainder of this chapter.

#### I. WOMEN IN PUBLIC WORSHIP

The activity of women "in the church" (cf. 1 Cor. 14:34,35), that is in the public assemblies of Christians, is brought under careful regulation in the epistles of the New Testament. The fact that such regulations were needed makes clearer the extent to which women shared in the life of the early church.<sup>10</sup> These regulations do not supersede but rather supplement the principle of religious equality so often stated in the early writings. They are stated as follows:

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even

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<sup>10</sup> As Dobschütz, op. cit., p. 39.

all one as if she were shaven.<sup>11</sup>

Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.<sup>12</sup>

But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in quietness.<sup>13</sup>

The question of subordination. The first problem involved in these regulations is that of subordination of women to men in the public assembly. It centers around the use of the veil as indicated in the first-mentioned reference above, and it is one of the questions which the Corinthians had written to Paul. Two factors probably contributed to the rise of this problem. One was the proclamation of the principle of religious equality which was undoubtedly not limited to the Galatian churches. From this it would not be difficult to jump to the conclusion that:

Then there is no longer any difference, especially in worship, where we are all before God, between the demeanour of the male and that of the female. If the male speaks to his brethren or to God with his head uncovered, why should not the female do so also? And with the spirit of freedom which animated the Church of Corinth, it is not probable that they had stopped short at theory. They had

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:3-5.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

<sup>13</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12.

already gone the length of practice; this seems to be implied by vers. 15, 16.<sup>14</sup>

The second factor was one of practical expediency. Women, no doubt, had exercised the gift of prophecy, for the Spirit of Pentecost was promised to daughters as well as sons, handmaidens as well as bondmen (cf. Acts 2:17-18). Though there are almost no examples of the gift of prophecy being exercised by women in the New Testament, it is asserted that Philip had four daughters, virgins, who prophesied (cf. Acts 21:9), and the heretical prophetess Jezebel of Thyatira at least "tacitly presupposes that women could be, and actually were, prophetesses."<sup>15</sup> The church at Corinth which lacked no χάρισμα (cf. 1 Cor. 1:7) surely had women who supposed at least that they had and ought to exercise the gift of prophecy. It is easy to see, then, how they might reason. "Very possibly the women had urged that, if the Spirit moved them to speak, they must speak; and how could they speak if their faces were veiled?"<sup>16</sup> From these two causes the question of the veiling of women arises.

The answer to this question is in certain respects for our purposes only of secondary importance in relation to the principles

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<sup>14</sup> F. Godet, First Epistle to the Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1887), II, 105.

<sup>15</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911, ICC), p. 230.



which St. Paul uses in framing his answer. Another has well said:

It is noticeable, in the first place, that S. Paul regards this question as worth deciding, and does not brush it aside as trivial. There is a right, and a wrong, way of worshipping God. Secondly, he decides it by the touchstone of Christian doctrine. It is not a matter of taste; it is not a matter of national custom--S. Paul's decision runs counter to Jewish habit;--Christian ritual must conform to and express Christian doctrine, and on all points of importance doctrine will give the needed guidance. Thirdly, natural instincts of reverence and propriety must not be ruled out of court. And, fourthly, the duty of a local--S. Paul would no doubt add, of a national--church is to "hold fast the traditions" committed to it, and to see that it does not set at nought Apostolic practice and the custom of other churches.<sup>17</sup>

The importance of noticing that these regulations are an expression of Christian doctrine cannot be overemphasized, and the principal doctrine on which the regulations are based is that of the subordination of woman to man. Equality of spiritual privilege does not nullify the principle of subordination which permeates the church, and evidently it was never in Paul's mind that it should. "Neither male nor female" expresses the principle of union; "the head of the woman is the man" states subordination. Neither inferiority nor any deprivation of an immediate relation to the Lord is implied. This is guaranteed by the principle of religious equality which Paul is careful to restate in the words: "Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord" (ver. 11). At the same time woman's position is secondary for she was created out of man (ver. 8). The reference is, of course, to Genesis 2:21-23, and "whether the story

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<sup>17</sup> H. L. Goudge, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, p. 97.

of the extracted rib is read as poetry or prosaic fact, the relationship set forth is the same."<sup>18</sup> The Christian doctrine of order in creation which involves subordination requires the Christian practice of manifesting that order in public worship by the veiling of women. "Before man, the lord of creation, woman must have her head covered at worship, since that is the proper way for her to recognize the divine order at Creation."<sup>19</sup>

Paul's mention of the angels (ver. 10) confirms the importance of the emphasis on order, for as Moffatt writes:

Paul has in mind the midrash on Gen. i. 26 f., which made good angels not only mediators of the Law (Gal. iii. 19), but guardians of the created order. . . . They were specially present at worship; in his Greek Bible the apostle read allusions to this, e. g. in Ps. cxxxviii. 1 . . . while in the apocalyptic (Tobit xiii. 12, Test. Levi iii. 21. Rev. viii. 3) they were supposed to mediate the prayers of the faithful as well as revelations made to seers and prophets at a service.<sup>20</sup>

Thus the early church (and this was the custom of the churches generally<sup>21</sup>) while offering religious equality in spiritual privilege insisted on manifesting in their public worship the principle of subordination of women to men by the veiling of women.

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<sup>18</sup> Findlay, op. cit., II, 874.

<sup>19</sup> James Moffatt, The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938, MNTC), p. 153.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>21</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:16.

The question of silence. The second problem concerns the vocal ministry of women in the assemblies of the early Christians. This involves among other things what appears to be a contradiction in St. Paul's own teaching on this subject. In the passage just discussed he seems to imply clearly that women may pray and prophesy in the public assembly if veiled.<sup>22</sup> Yet when discussing spiritual gifts and especially the gift of tongues he apparently is led "to withdraw even that limited permission"<sup>23</sup> when he writes "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak."<sup>24</sup> The author of the Pastorals is equally emphatic in declaring that women are not to teach in the public assembly of the church.<sup>25</sup>

Many solutions have been suggested for this difficulty. Edwards, cited above, simply says that the permission to pray and prophesy is withdrawn upon further reflection. Findlay, placing weight on the comparison with 1 Timothy 2:12, argues that praying and prophesying among women were part of their regular and normally expected ministry and that the prohibition of chapter 14 is against "Church-teaching and

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<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:5.

<sup>23</sup> Edwards, op. cit., p. 381.

<sup>24</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34.

<sup>25</sup> 1 Timothy 2:12.

authoritative direction as a role unfit for women."<sup>26</sup> A more recent writer (and a woman) also defends the regularity of women's praying and prophesying but thinks that the prohibition is against unseemly hysterical outbursts which might occur from the women in the excitement of men speaking in tongues. This, she says, was "called forth by special circumstances and never intended to be binding on all women or for all time."<sup>27</sup> It will be noticed that these proposed solutions have one thing in common. They all place emphasis on the concession to praying and prophesying in chapter 11 and, as it were, determine the meaning of the prohibition of chapter 14 by that. Consequently, when considering the prohibition of the Pastorals, its value will be deprecated as not representing the Apostle's views. Thus Scott says:

The rule is laid down authoritatively in the name of the great apostle, but it is doubtful whether Paul would have expressed himself quite so strongly. He was indeed averse to women making themselves heard in the assembly (1 Cor. xiv. 35), but he by no means forbade them to teach. . . . Although women are forbidden in 1 Corinthians to put themselves forward at the public meeting, it is assumed that they take their part with the men in praying and prophesying (1 Cor. xi. 5). Perhaps in the present passage the word teach is to be taken in the technical sense of making a set public address.<sup>28</sup>

One question in relation to this statement is obvious: How can a woman

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<sup>26</sup> Findlay, op. cit., II, 915.

<sup>27</sup> Irene M. Robbins, "St. Paul and the Ministry of Women," Expository Times, XLVI, No. 4 (January, 1935), 186.

<sup>28</sup> E. F. Scott, The Pastoral Epistles (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1936, MNTC), p. 26.

teach without putting herself forward at the public meeting? Miss Robbins is no more successful in solving the problem of these passages when she declares that the value of 1 Timothy 2:12 "as an expression of the Apostle's commands is lessened when we remember that modern scholars consider this epistle to be the work of an earnest Paulinist early in the second century."<sup>29</sup> But would not an earnest Paulinist of that early date be more likely to represent than to misrepresent the opinion of the Apostle? At any rate, it would certainly not be at all easy to show that he did not represent the thought of the early church on this subject.<sup>30</sup>

In the light of these objections one begins to wonder at least if the emphasis in Paul's teaching should not be put on the prohibition of 1 Corinthians 14 rather than the permission of chapter 11. If so, it would make the silence of women in public meetings the general rule and the exercise of prayer or prophecy the exception. It is just as likely as not that on this matter there had been little development, though not perhaps little definition, from the time of Paul's letter to

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<sup>29</sup> Robbins, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. P. N. Harrison, The Problem of the Pastoral Epistles (Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 9: "The writer / believed honestly and wholeheartedly the Pauline gospel as he understood it. At the same time he shared the ideas of the Church of his own day on matters both of belief and of polity. . . . Of this difference, however, from the original Pauline conceptions, the writer himself was no more aware than were his contemporaries. He and they regarded themselves as simply holding on to the genuine apostolic teaching."

the Corinthians and the writing of 1 Timothy. If there was development it was away from the public ministry of women at all, for in discussing the matter of public prayer the writer limits its exercise to men.<sup>31</sup> This would seem to indicate that in Paul's day the exception was not the prohibition but the permission for women to speak in any capacity in the public worship.

However, it is admitted that this argument from the Pastorals is not conclusive in deciding that the emphasis in Paul should be on the general prohibition rather than the special concession. It is confirmed, though, by two other considerations, the literary context and the historical context.

The argument from the literary context is a very obvious though evidently overlooked one. It is simply this: the question which evoked the answer recorded in 1 Corinthians 11 concerned women's using the veil. Was it necessary with the freedom and equality they now had in Christ? Paul was not dealing with the question of women's praying and prophesying. The question which evoked the answer recorded in chapter 14 was the question of the proper use of spiritual gifts. In this chapter he was dealing with the question of the public ministry of

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. 1 Timothy 2:8-9 where the duties of men and women are contrasted. βούλομαι οὖν προσεύχεσθαι τοὺς ἄνδρας ἐν παντὶ τόπῳ . . . Ὡσαύτως γυναῖκας ἐν καταστολῇ κοσμίῳ . . . κοσμεῖν ἑαυτάς . . . ὃ πρέπει γυναῖξιν ἐπαγγελλομέναις θεοσέβειαν, δι' ἔργων ἀγαθῶν. The use of ἀνὴρ clearly places the responsibility of prayer on males, and public prayer is evidently excluded from the good works which women are to perform.

women. In other words, the one concerns women's position; the other, their activity in the public assembly. When dealing with principles which govern the activity of women in public he declares that they should keep silent. Thus, this would seem to indicate clearly that the emphasis should be put on the general prohibition of the chapter which deals specifically with the question of ministry.

Of what meaning, then, it will be asked, is the mention in chapter 11 of women's praying and prophesying? In the light of the general prohibition of chapter 14 which Paul says was customarily practiced in all the churches, it would appear that the fact that women prayed and prophesied at all was extraordinary and probably limited to the Corinthian congregation. As has been pointed out, Corinth was a city of loose standards, and although there were undoubtedly women of good standing among the early converts to Christianity, just as surely there were many converts from the lower classes whose presence in the assembly would give rise to many problems. The obvious result is clearly seen by Dobschütz:

As usual, the freer and more progressive tendency gained more acceptance. Among the Libertines, . . . emancipated women must have played an important part. They were evidently the least trustworthy element in the Church, the soul of the opposition against the Apostle, and his earnest discipline. He becomes impassioned whenever he has to speak of their "emancipation," which nothing could bring to reason. . . .<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Dobschütz, op. cit., p. 37.



When, therefore, Paul deals with the question of discarding the veil, he recognizes the fact that some women were accustomed to praying and prophesying in the assembly, but that does not necessarily mean that he approves of it. This is the point which is overlooked. When he comes to speak his mind on the subject he lays down the strict prohibition against women speaking at all. However, it is true that he does not condemn outright the exceptional case when a woman would pray or prophesy as long as she was properly veiled, but the historical setting at Corinth supports the contention that this was an exceptional occurrence and one which was probably fairly well limited to the Corinthian congregation. Again Dobschütz, though not carrying the conclusions as far as above, recognizes that "the whole question seems to have been a specifically Corinthian one."<sup>33</sup> With this conclusion Godet substantially agrees, declaring in comparing these two Corinthian passages:

. . . we think we shall not be far from the apostle's view if we thus state the result of the two passages taken together: "As to women, if, under the influence of a sudden inspiration or revelation, they wish to take the word in the assembly to give utterance to a prayer or prophecy, I do not object; only let them not do so without having the face veiled. But in general, let women keep silence. For it is improper on their part to speak in church."<sup>34</sup>

Robertson and Plummer go a bit further by suggesting that the case of

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Godet, op. cit., II, 313-14.

women praying and prophesying may be hypothetical.

They had been claiming equality with men in the matter of the veil, by discarding this mark of subjection in Church, and apparently they had also been attempting to preach, or at any rate had been asking questions during service. We are not sure whether St Paul contemplated the possibility of women prophesying in exceptional cases. What is said in xi. 5 may be hypothetical. Teaching he forbids them to attempt; . . . a rule taken over from the synagogue and maintained in the primitive Church (1 Tim. ii. 12).<sup>35</sup>

Thus, one suggests (and motivated, as some other writers cannot be, only by a desire to discover the primitive church's outlook on this matter without trying to defend or deny a principle applicable today) that the early church did not make a practice of permitting women to speak in their public meetings. That it may have been done in the exercise of prayer or prophecy cannot be absolutely denied in every case, but it decidedly was the exception and not the general practice of the churches. At Corinth it probably occurred more often because of the nature of the composition of the church, but even there Paul's governing principle is that of silence when he deals directly with the question of the exercise of spiritual gifts. That this principle early became codified, as it were, is suggested by the evidence of the Pastorals. The general governing principle throughout was that women should not have a public vocal ministry.

This matter of silence is linked to the matter of subjection which is again grounded in the Genesis account of creation and fall (1 Cor. 14:34, cf. Gen. 3:16). Thus the principle of silence finds its

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<sup>35</sup> Robertson and Plummer, op. cit., pp. 324-25.

basis in the more general principle of the subordinate position of women which in Paul's mind is a result of the fall and which would continue throughout the present economy. Godet says:

And as the attitude of authority over the man is contrary to that of obedience which was imposed on the woman during the present economy, he draws the conclusion that the speaking of the woman in public is in contradiction to the position assigned to her by the Divine will expressed in the law. . . . the silence of women in worship is only an application of the general condition of subordination which is imposed on them in relation to man. Of course the law contained nothing regarding the part of women in the assemblies; but, by determining the character of their life in general, it had, according to Paul's view, indirectly settled the question.<sup>36</sup>

The important point is, of course, that Paul's basic principle is not simply something which was forged because of a particular situation in a local church in the first century. The author of the Pastorals also refers to the account of creation when he lays down the rule of silence. The fact that Adam was first formed means for him that "Adam had an existence independent of woman, and therefore could not be in any way subordinate to her."<sup>37</sup> He further adds the idea that "the woman's yielding to the wiles of a serpent shows her to be an unsafe guide."<sup>38</sup> Subordination (ὑποτάσσεισθαι of 1 Cor. 14:34), dependence (1 Tim. 2:13), and difference of nature (1 Tim. 2:14) are the reasons

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<sup>36</sup> Godet, op. cit., II, 311.

<sup>37</sup> R. St John Parry, The Pastoral Epistles (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1920), p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Loc. cit.

the early church assigned for the non-participation of women in public vocal ministry. Thus, the regulation of silence was not grounded on special and temporary conditions in the church;<sup>39</sup> rather it was related to a far more basic and fundamental reason; i.e., a difference in the position and nature of male and female.

## II. WIDOWS

The cause of the widow and fatherless is often spoken of in the Old Testament. God is spoken of as the judge of widows (Psa. 68:5), and the Deuteronomic code pronounced a special curse on those who afflict widows.<sup>40</sup> The leviratus, i.e. the marriage of a widow by her brother-in-law after the death of her husband, effected the protection of widow's rights. However, even that law provided that release might be had for the brother-in-law when circumstances were such as to produce hardship on him if he fulfilled his obligation (cf. Deut. 25:7-10; Ruth 4:4-10). Consequently with this neglect of Levirate marriage, widows, often left to make their own way, became the objects of charity (cf. Deut. 24:19; 26:12-13). Thus, near the time of Christ, it is not surprising to discover that the Jews evidently had a fund in the temple for the relief of widows and orphans.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> In contrast see Adeney, op. cit., p. 275.

<sup>40</sup> Deuteronomy 27:19.

<sup>41</sup> 2 Maccabees 3:10.

When such widows, who may have been receiving support from a temple fund, joined the early Christian community this support ceased, and the early Christians with their Jewish backgrounds would naturally assume the responsibility of caring for them. No doubt they were constrained not only by their obedience to the Old Testament Scriptures but also by the example of the Lord toward widows.<sup>42</sup> Thus, in the early pages of the Acts of the Apostles a large group of widows appears,<sup>43</sup> and that the church should expect to aid in their relief is a natural and expected consequence of the Jewish background and Christ's example. In the light of this, it seems that the difficulty which Foakes-Jackson imagines is not real--". . . the difficulty remains how it came to pass that the widows had from the very first become a special charge on the Church."<sup>44</sup> It may be true that chronologically Acts 6 does not follow immediately on Acts 5, but the common meal (Acts 2:46) and the community of goods (Acts 4:35) would certainly have drawn attention to widows' needs, which, coupled with the two reasons stated above, make their becoming a special charge on the church quite a normal development.

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Heinrich Ewald, The History of Israel, VIII, 202.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 6:1-7.

<sup>44</sup> F. J. Foakes-Jackson, The Acts of the Apostles (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931, MNTC), p. 52.

In the light of Foakes-Jackson's words, what was implicit above needs to be made more explicit, viz., that the mention of widows' relief in Acts 6 is not the first time that widows were given relief. It is quite obvious that the practice had been going on regularly before the murmuring arose though the distribution was not done systematically. The murmuring brought a partial organization, but it is not as though suddenly and without any previous preparation either in Judaism or Christianity widows' relief is undertaken by the Church. It is quite true that "before this the duty of helping the poor, and among them widows, was left to the dictates of spontaneous individual charity in the daily ministration; now it was partially organized."<sup>45</sup> As yet there was no order of widows though a class of widows was of course recognized, nor are they assigned any services to the church in return for their support.

That there was such a class of widows who were prominent in the other Christian communities is clear from the story of Dorcas.<sup>46</sup> The story indicates that these widows were nothing more than the recipients of relief and were not bound together in any sort of official order but having ties merely because of their common need. That Dorcas herself was a widow must not be assumed; if she were, at least she stood apart

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<sup>45</sup> Donald Mackenzie, "Widows," Dictionary of the Apostolic Church (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1918), II, 676.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 9:36-41.

from the others who were classed so. Turner is quite correct when he says:

Dorcas, who devoted herself to the making of clothes and undergarments, was not necessarily herself a widow; if I understand St. Luke's meaning aright, the widows who came to make lamentation over the corpse were those who had profited by her charitable work.<sup>47</sup>

What motivated Dorcas in her good works? No doubt, the motivation was a mixture of such instruction along the lines which Judaism would give (as evinced by the description of a good woman in the last chapter of Proverbs) plus the instruction and example of Jesus (cf. Matt. 6:2-4). These are quite sufficient motives to account for the naturalness of the account of Dorcas in Acts. Adeney states these two causes in this way:

We should do injustice to womankind in general, and to the women of the old Jewish Church in particular, if we took it for granted that the charities which blossomed in the life of such a saint as Dorcas were entirely new flowers of grace quite unknown to the world before the time of Christianity. . . .

Still, while we make full allowance for these facts, not in any degree attempting to minimise them in order to exalt Christianity, . . . we may go on and observe how much the gospel of Jesus Christ deepens and quickens the motive for charity. If so much kindness is seen in . . . Judaism, how much more should be found in the church of which brotherly love growing out of the love of God in Christ is to be the characteristic note!<sup>48</sup>

Thus, in the early days of the church's history widows, cut off from the support of the temple treasury, became the objects of charity.

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<sup>47</sup> C. H. Turner, "Ministries of Women in the Primitive Church," The Ministry of Women, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> Adeney, op. cit., pp. 210-11.



There is no record, however, that they ministered to the church in any active way in return for the relief given them, nor that they formed in any sense an order in the church.

The locus classicus, however, about widows in the New Testament is found in the instructions of 1 Timothy 5:3-16. Harrison has shown that the Pastorals are the work of "a devout, sincere, and earnest Paulinist, who lived at Rome or Ephesus" and who wrote them in the half-century 95-145 A. D.<sup>49</sup> That which is said about widows seems to indicate that they were written during a period later than that of the undisputed Pauline epistles, for provision is made for a definite order with specific requirements for admission. The passage in 1 Timothy is not without its difficulties which must be faced. The problems center about two questions: (1) What was the purpose of the enrolling; and (2) What, if any, duties did the widows have to the church?

Some of the confusion and vagueness of the commentaries might be dissipated if the principal subject of the passage were kept in mind. The subject under discussion is the relief of widows. Any service to be performed in return, any enrolling, any qualifications are all secondary to the principal theme. Evidently since the last glimpse of widows' relief seen in Acts, the Church had continued to support them, but with the passage of time abuses had arisen. One of these was that relatives of widows were not assuming their own responsibilities toward

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<sup>49</sup> P. N. Harrison, op. cit., p. 8.

their widows but rather were pushing the matter of support onto the church. Consequently, the admonition to relatives to be responsible for widows in their families is repeated twice in the passage. In the first instance it evidently concerns younger unenrolled widows (vs. 4). In the second instance it most plausibly relates to the enrolled widows (vs. 16). Parry <sup>5</sup> it quite right in understanding this not as a mere repetition of verse 4. He remarks:

Since v. 9 the whole thought has been of enrolled widows, who do not include all necessitous widows. Here then it is a question also of enrolled widows: some of them would be well to do and able to support themselves, some necessitous. Of the latter class, some would have relations able to support them, and, in that case, though the widows are doing Church work, they are to be supported by their relations: others would have no such relations and are to be supported by the Church.<sup>50</sup>

The first principle, then, in the matter of the relief of widows is that relatives must assume their support whenever possible.

The second principle is that the church must continue to support those who are unable to be supported by relatives. 'Widows indeed,' ὄντως χήραι, or 'real widows,' are not to be defined, as many commentators seem to imply at least, as the enrolled widows. They are defined as those who are desolate, trusting in God, and continuing in prayers day and night (vs. 5). Financial and family status, not age, is the primary qualification for a 'widow indeed.' It cannot be assumed, therefore, that enrolled widows were the only ones who had a claim upon the church for its charity. Turner, for all of his

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<sup>50</sup> Parry, op. cit., p. 31.

excellent understanding of the subject, seems to go astray here, for he says:

Only genuine widows or, in other words, widows who are left entirely alone can be enrolled on the Church list: the community, that is to say, will support only those who have no family to support them. But this preliminary classification is not all; there are tests of age, character, and past history to be satisfied before the applicant can be admitted to the position of a Church widow. . . . If they pass these tests, the community undertakes to be at charges for their material sustenance.<sup>51</sup>

This idea, however, sets up an artificial distinction and ignores the plain injunction to honor 'widows indeed' (vs. 3). Even Turner, as do the great majority of commentators, understands *τίμα* to be related to material support. The enrolling is not an added qualification for a 'widow indeed.' Scott's objection is convincing.

It cannot be supposed, for instance, that the Church would refuse help to a widow if she was under sixty, for this restriction would be simply cruel if the question were one of charity; the widows in direst need would generally be the younger ones, who were left with small children.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, to say that the enrolling was entirely unrelated to material need is to miss the point too, for it seems that, unless they had relatives, enrolled widows were the special responsibility of the church. Therefore, the best that can be said is that financial need is related to enrolling but not determinative of enrolling since the relief of it by the church was not limited to enrolled widows.

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<sup>51</sup> Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

The second question has to do with what ministry widows may have had. It is agreed by all that widows did have a special ministry of prayer and supplication for the church, but it is not agreed as to what additional ministry they may or may not have had. Turner is very sure that they were nothing more "than the recipients of the official poor relief of the Church."<sup>53</sup> Scott is just as sure that the enrolling was indicative of "certain duties the Church required" of them because they "could be counted on to devote themselves wholly to the work."<sup>54</sup>

There are two objections to limiting the enrolled widows to those who were engaged in some sort of work. The first is well stated by White:

. . . it is difficult to suppose that St. Paul, or any other practically minded administrator, would contemplate a presbyteral order of widows, the members of which would enter on their duties at the age of 60, an age relatively more advanced in the East and in the first century than in the West and in our own time.<sup>55</sup>

The second objection is that if whatever ministry widows may have had may be presumed to be related to their going from house to house (cf. vs. 13), then obviously the younger widows were engaged in it also and were abusing it--thus calling forth the restriction. Ewald makes a suggestion what that ministry might have been. He thinks that widows

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<sup>53</sup> Turner, op. cit., p. 88.

<sup>54</sup> Scott, loc. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Newport J. D. White, The First Epistle to Timothy (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910, Expositor's Greek Testament), IV, 130.

went from house to house collecting money for the needs of the church.

And when we consider that after the stoning of Stephen every form of community of goods ceased, it becomes quite probable that then this more voluntary institution for keeping up mutual support by means of contributions of worldly wealth took its place. The widows, therefore, as regularly supported by the church, and as constantly employed in its service, occupied a prominent position, and were regarded as near in rank to Christ himself.<sup>56</sup>

But this is merely a suggestion. However, verse 10 may show more clearly that widows (and of course it applies to younger unenrolled ones) may have been responsible for the rearing of orphan children. This may have been part of their ministry to the Christian community; but whatever it was or was not, it is clear that the actual ministry was not limited to enrolled widows though certainly the two ministries suggested could be performed by women over sixty.

To sum up: (1) relief by the church was not limited to enrolled widows though it was assumed in the case of all enrolled widows except those who may have had relatives to support them; (2) the ministry of prayer was expected of all 'widows indeed' regardless of age, and even other ministries which might be implied in the text were not particularly limited to enrolled widows. What, then, was the purpose of the catalogue of widows over sixty who met certain requirements? That it meant financial support by the church in almost every case of those enrolled seems clear. That it meant a special ministry by those enrolled which was not performed by other widows or even other women is

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<sup>56</sup> Heinrich Ewald, The History of Israel, VIII, 202.

not supported by the passage. Official support is part of the catalogue; official duties were not. The catalogue was instituted primarily to correct and systematize financial matters with regard to the support of widows. On the whole one agrees with Turner's viewpoint though the institution of a catalogue doubtless paved the way for future orders of ministries among women. At this point in history these matters are undefined. "There are more detailed regulations for the qualifications of a widow than there were for bishop or deacon, as if the order were not yet fully established."<sup>57</sup>

In the attempt to unravel the threads of thought concerning an order of widows, one must not neglect to notice three other facts in this section that relate to the status of women. First of all, it is evident that widows are accorded a place of honor in the early church, and they are the first group of women to be honored in any sense as a group. Second, younger women are advised to marry and no preference is given to celibacy. The reason is not difficult to discover: "When the Pastorals were written, the hope of the Parousia had failed; Christians are now advised to adapt themselves to ordinary conditions and to provide for the continuance of the Church as part of the present order."<sup>58</sup> Third, women's work is still primarily connected with the home. "I

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<sup>57</sup> Walter Lock, The Pastoral Epistles (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1924, ICC), p. 56.

<sup>58</sup> Scott, op. cit., p. 62.

will therefore that the younger women marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully."<sup>59</sup>

### III. DEACONESSES

The position of the deaconess in the New Testament is not so clear or easily defined as that of women in public worship or of widows. Harnack seems to understand Pliny's mention of the two ministrae in his letter to Trajan to be the first reference to deaconesses as any sort of recognized group in the church.<sup>60</sup> Of course that would mean that the New Testament does not contain any references to official deaconesses. Lightfoot, on the other hand, is just as emphatic in declaring that they did comprise an order in New Testament times. He says: "The Apostolic Church had its organized ministries of women--its order of deaconesses and its order of widows. Women had their definite place in the ecclesiastical system of those primitive times."<sup>61</sup> In another place he declares: "As I read my New Testament, the female diaconate is as definite an institution in the Apostolic Church as the male diaconate. Phoebe is as much a deacon as Stephen or Philip is a

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<sup>59</sup> 1 Timothy 5:14.

<sup>60</sup> Harnack, op. cit., I, 122n.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Barber Lightfoot, Sermons Preached on Special Occasions, p. 226.



deacon."<sup>62</sup> Obviously, with such divergence of viewpoints some investigation and explanation is in order. Unfortunately, the evidence is scanty. Actually only two verses comprise the basic evidence on which this question must be decided. They are, of course, Romans 16:1 and 1 Timothy 3:11.

That women had a significant, though secondary, place in the life and activity of the early years of the history of the church has been demonstrated. It is clear that women served (*διακονέω*) Christ. The seven chosen by the early church in Jerusalem served tables (*διακονεῖν τραπέζαις*, Acts 6:2). Others who served and either to whom or to whose service *διάκονος* or *διακονία* is applied include Paul (Acts 20:24; Eph. 3:7), Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15), Archippus (Col. 4:17), Timothy (1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 4:5), Apollos (1 Cor. 3:5), and Epaphras (Col. 1:7). *Διάκονος* is also used so widely as to include the work of our Lord (Gal. 2:17) and that of governmental power (Rom. 13:4). It is the most general term used for all kinds of ministry, and in this general sense there is of course a diaconate in the New Testament. The real question is, however, Did it come to be used in an

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<sup>62</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Primary Charge* (London: Macmillan and Co., [n. d.]), p. 33. Those who appeal to Lightfoot as an authority for allowing all kinds of ministry to deaconesses should note his further word: "We may find some difficulty in defining the precise line where S. Paul's prohibition (1 Cor. xiv. 34), as interpreted in the light of other passages (1 Cor. xi. 5), fixes the limits of the woman's function as a religious teacher; but in the philanthropic and charitable work of the Church, which is her proper sphere, her capabilities are inexhaustible" (p. 33) [*italics not in the original*].

official sense to designate a special group with certain functions? The general or unofficial use of the word is easily recognized, but the problems concerning an official diaconate and the relation of women to it are far more complicated.

It has been generally considered that official deacons were first chosen to settle the dispute over the relief of widows in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-7). However, Vitranga was quite right in calling attention years ago to the fact that these were not deacons in the official sense, even though his reasoning may have been prejudiced by a desire to try to make the deacon the successor of the Chazzan of the synagogue and even though he may have been guilty of reading back into the Acts account functions which were later attributed to deacons.<sup>63</sup> In a more recent work, A. M. Farrer says that these seven were the first non-apostolic elders,<sup>64</sup> while Gregory Dix sees the official diaconate developing in the following way:

There were subordinate duties to be fulfilled towards the Christian society as a society, not easily included under episkopos--'superintendence,'--and those who performed these habitually come to be charged with them. In the course of a generation the performance of the duty hardens into a distinct office.<sup>65</sup>

These considerations certainly make it unwise to conclude that an of

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<sup>63</sup> Vitranga, op. cit., p. 914.

<sup>64</sup> Kenneth E. Kirk, editor, The Apostolic Ministry (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), p. 143.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 244.

official diaconate existed in the very first days of the life of the church in Jerusalem.

It is clear, however, that by the time Paul wrote to the Philippians there was in that church at least an order of deacons who are distinguished from the elders (Phil. 1:1). At the same time, δάκκος continues to be used in the general, unofficial sense (cf. Col. 1:7). When the Pastorals were written the diaconate is definitely a well-established and distinct body (1 Tim. 3:8-10), and still at the same time the word is used in that general sense (cf. 1 Tim. 4:6). Therefore, throughout the period of the canonical writings ministry in general is called 'deaconing,' while during the same period the official diaconate is developing into a distinctly recognized group in the Church.

The question of Phoebe, then, who is commended as a δάκκον τῆς ἐκκλησίας τῆς ἐν Κερχραῖς is a question of whether δάκκος is used in the general, unofficial sense of the word or in the more restricted use in connection with an established diaconate. Lightfoot is certain that Phoebe was a deacon in the official sense.<sup>66</sup> Godet, too, declares:

. . . a servant of the Lord, invested consequently with an ecclesiastical office. It has been denied that at so remote a period the office of deaconess could already be in existence. But why, if there were deacons . . . should there not have been also from

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<sup>66</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, Dissertations on the Apostolic Age (London: Macmillan and Co., 1892), p. 148.

primitive times a similar office discharged by women, members of the church?<sup>67</sup>

There can be no question but that there was need in the church for women workers. As Lightfoot points out:

The strict seclusion of the female sex in Greece and in some Oriental countries necessarily debarred them from the ministrations of men: and to meet the want thus felt, it was found necessary at an early date to admit women to the diaconate.<sup>68</sup>

Neither is there any doubt that Phoebe rendered important service to the church, but whether she gives evidence of an order of deaconesses is another matter. Linguistics and chronology both play an important part in the answer.

The linguistic consideration centers about Phoebe's designation as a *προστάτις πολλῶν*. Indeed, this is the strongest argument for Phoebe's being an official of the church at Cenchreae. In the New Testament *προΐστημι* distinctly includes the function of governing in the church,<sup>69</sup> and in the first reference at least there is no doubt that it is to official duties. All the other occurrences in the New Testament also include to a greater or lesser extent the idea of having authority or presiding either in the family or over oneself.<sup>70</sup> Thus the meaning ranges from simple presiding to definite ruling.

<sup>67</sup> F. Godet, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1881), II, 386.

<sup>68</sup> Lightfoot, loc. cit.

<sup>69</sup> 1 Timothy 5:17; Romans 12:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:12.

<sup>70</sup> 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12; Titus 3:8, 14.

Extra-biblical evidence throws further light on the meaning of προστάτης . Although they do not cite any instance of the use of the feminine form, Moulton and Milligan note that the masculine προστάτης is a title which "is applied to the office-bearer in a heathen religious association."<sup>71</sup> In Judaism the word was also used in an official sense. Josephus describes King David as "προστάτην τε καὶ κηδεμόνα γένους τῶν Ἑβραίων ,--protector and guardian of the Hebrew race."<sup>72</sup> Juster points out, further, that:

The President of the council was called, as often as not, gerusiarch, but sometimes, also ἐπιστάτης τῶν παλαίων or προστάτης . In the metropolitan cities this Presidency was exercised by the chief Jew of the province, that is to say, by the little patriarch. Elsewhere it was the chief religious person--the archisynagogos--who, as often as not, had this presidency.<sup>73</sup>

Schürer is quite definite also in declaring that in the age of the procurators (44-66 A. D.) the high priest who held the presidency of the sanhedrim was called προστάτης τοῦ ἔθνους , and although these high

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<sup>71</sup> James Hope Moulton and George Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1926), p. 551.

<sup>72</sup> Antiquities, VII, 380.

<sup>73</sup> Jean Juster, Les Juifs dans l'empire Romain (Paris: Librairie Paul Geuthner, 1914), I, 442-43.

priests were set up and removed at the pleasure of the Roman procurator nevertheless they did have governmental functions.<sup>74</sup>

How should this evidence be evaluated in Phoebe's case? The fact that she is termed a *διάκονος* does not imply an order of deaconesses, for, as will be shown, the term is non-technical at this time in the history of the church. But the fact that she is termed a *προστάτις* is significant, for even in its most non-technical sense the word implies active and important functions. The question is, of course, How technical is the meaning of the word in this instance? Did Phoebe's service include that of ruling in the church as an office-bearer? One feels this would be an unwarranted conclusion for two reasons. First, although *προστάτης* would imply official ruling, there is no instance of a woman holding such an office (unless, of course Phoebe herself be the exception, but such an exception would leave unresolved the problem of the silence of the extra-biblical literature in this regard). Second, although, as has been shown, honorary titles of the synagogue were given to women for outstanding service (usually charity), these titles had no official significance. Again, Phoebe would have to be the lone exception unless it be true that her title indicates only honor and activity but not official position. Actually, the very fact that she is called by a title which is linked to the

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<sup>74</sup> Emil Schürer, A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1890), Division I, Volume II, p. 72.

eldership in other places but which is here linked with the diaconate seems to reinforce the thesis that both titles are used in an unofficial sense. However, one must reiterate that even in its unofficial sense προστὰς evidently must include the idea of some kind of leadership, but not rulership in Phoebe's case. Sanday and Headlam suggest that her leadership was that which she exercised by virtue of her wealth and social position in the community which enabled her "to act as patroness of a small and struggling community."<sup>75</sup> Her activity doubtless included many of the things attributed to other women in the New Testament, and certainly her importance is not to be disparaged; but to see in her evidence for an established order of deaconesses or for female officials in the church is to see more than the evidence warrants.

In addition to this linguistic argument, there is also a chronological argument which confirms the conclusion that though women had important duties in ministering there was not yet an ecclesiastical order of deaconesses. Robinson's statement of it cannot be improved on and his conclusion is sane.

On the other hand, since there is not in the two earlier groups of Paul's epistles any other indication that διακονία is a special office in the Church, this, which occurs in the second group, would be a solitary and somewhat puzzling exception. Moreover, as Cenchreae was the E. port of Corinth, this case practically belongs to the Corinthian church. In that church special mention is made of the διακονία of Stephanas and his household, the word διακονία

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<sup>75</sup> William Sanday and Arthur E. Headlam, The Epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1898, ICC), p. 418.



being used in its broadest sense. There also Chloe and her household were of note. It may be, therefore, that Phoebe was another woman of influence who held a corresponding pre-eminence of service in the neighbouring port, a pre-eminence that earned for her at the apostle's hands the honourable title of *διάκονος* of the church; for she had been a helper . . . of many and of the apostle himself. If we could assume that the diaconate was formally established in the Corinthian church at this time, we should certainly conclude that Phoebe was one of the women who served it / but only if all other evidence pointed to the same conclusion /; but this assumption is in sharp contrast with the silence of Paul's epistles as to any kind of definite ecclesiastical organisation at Corinth.

Of Phoebe, then, we may say with security that she is a witness to the important services rendered by women in the primitive Church; but in tracing the history of the diaconate it will not be wise to assume that the word *διάκονος* is used of her in the strictly official sense.<sup>76</sup>

In the Pastoral Epistles where we meet more fully developed ecclesiastical organization, qualifications are given for the elders, for deacons, and for *γυναικας* (1 Tim. 3:11). The problem has been obscured by the Authorised Version's translation of the word as wives (of the deacons), for the problem is to decide whether these women are only wives or some sort of women workers, even deaconesses. Modern commentators in great majority understand the reference to be to deaconesses.<sup>77</sup> This view is supported by the fact that women workers would be needed, and consequently one would expect to find them listed among church officers. Further, the omission of any reference to elders' wives seems to indicate that the women are not deacons' wives. But

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<sup>76</sup> J. Armitage Robinson, "Deacon and Deaconess," Encyclopaedia Biblica (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1899), I, 1039.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Walter Lock, op. cit., p. 40.

this view necessitates a suggestion that verse 11 is out of place because the following verse reverts to qualifications for deacons. Unless it can be shown that the verse is out of place it is more natural to understand the author as not changing the subject, which means that he is referring to deacons' wives in verse 11. When there is no other reason for a rearrangement, than at best such a suggestion is hardly conclusive. Relative to the necessity for having women workers because of the condition of women in heathen society, it is certainly agreed that such necessity is evident. But one must be extremely careful not to read back subsequent development in church history into the early dawn of church organization. In view of these considerations about this context it would be unwise to assert so dogmatically as another has that "though no individuals are mentioned, we may conclude that the official ministry of women was an established fact in the Church of Ephesus."<sup>78</sup>

What, then, may be safely concluded about these women? Surely there was need for the ministry of women to other women in the Christian community. Without doubt, as has been shown, women played an active role in the life of the early church, but they did not assume a place of leadership. If deacons were concerned with physical and material needs of the community, what would be unnatural about their wives

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<sup>78</sup> Cecilia Robinson, The Ministry of Deaconesses (London: Methuen & Co., 1898), p. 13.

sharing early in that ministry especially in relation to women's needs?<sup>79</sup> If a specific class of women workers was established at this time it would seem plausible that the writer should have used a more specific designation. Διάκονος with the feminine article or διακόνισσα would be expected to come to his mind more naturally if this were the case. That these women were a female diaconate appears to fall into the category of assumption; if there were such a well-established order as is claimed the immediate silence of extra-biblical literature is difficult to account for. That these women ministered and that they, indeed, performed ministries of a διάκονος, used in its general sense, is quite evident. At Ephesus the particular group of women who were active in this manner were the wives of deacons; at Cenchreae it was only one woman, Phoebe. But that there was any official body of deaconesses, in the sense in which that term has come to be used, in the New Testament is untenable.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> As H. P. Liddon, St. Paul's First Epistle to Timothy (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), p. 34.

<sup>80</sup> Miss Robinson in the chapter "The Ministry of Women in the New Testament" in the work cited, in which she speaks of Priscilla, Phoebe, Dorcas in the same breath, unconsciously attempts to read the official into the unofficial. Sanday and Headlam in their comments on Romans 16:1, one fears, read later history back into the earlier record.

**PART III**

**THE EVIDENCE OF THE NON-CANONICAL LITERATURE ON  
THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH TO  
THE END OF THE THIRD CENTURY**

## CHAPTER IX

### THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS

Strictly speaking the term Apostolic Fathers should be a much more limited designation than its general use indicates, for it is usually used to include literature which was unquestionably not written by Apostolic Fathers. However,

. . . it is highly convenient to have gathered together in one whole, the Church literature which belongs to the sub-apostolic times and thus bridges over the chasm which separates the age of the Apostles from the age of the Apologists.<sup>1</sup>

It is in this sense that the designation is used in this section.

Material relative to the status of women during this period is not abundant; yet it is necessary to cite the references that do exist and to draw whatever accurate conclusions are possible.

#### I. THE DIDACHÉ

The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles in its present version is apparently composite, for comparison of the Latin version with the form found in the Apostolic Constitutions, Book VII, suggests that it is a recension of an earlier document. The terms of address frequently employed may possibly indicate the hand of a definite redactor. Streeter places the date of the document between 90 and 100 A. D.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the Didaché is instruction of candidates for baptism in the

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<sup>1</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1890), I, I, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Burnett Hillman Streeter, op. cit., p. 279-287.

commandments of the Lord as set forth in the Way of Life as opposed to the Way of Death. It "can hardly be regarded as a manual of doctrine, for it deals surprisingly little with the main assertions of the Christian faith."<sup>3</sup>

Characteristics of the ministry of the Apostles included its itinerant and charismatic nature. The Didaché with its instructions for crediting or discrediting a class of travelling missionaries who followed in the wake of the Apostles indicates that this type of charismatic ministry continued after the deaths of some of the Apostles but it was treated with more reserve and discrimination. If the present form of the document dates from near the end of the first century, one may detect that in this period ministry was beginning to devolve more and more on regularly-appointed officials in the church. It is to these two classes of people, the prophets and the officials, that attention is drawn.

In chapter 11 which deals with prophets, there is no mention or even implication that women were included among their number. Indeed, the pronouns, relative pronouns, articles, participles referring to the prophets are all masculine. Granted that this does not necessarily in itself exclude women, the silence with regard to specific mention of them cannot be without some significance. It would have been very

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), p. 36.

simple to have written, for instance, *μηδεὶς αὐτὸν καὶ αὐτὴν κρινέτω* instead of *μηδεὶς αὐτὸν κρινέτω*.<sup>4</sup> Matters concerning the appointment of bishops and deacons in chapter 15 are related to men (*ἄνδρας*). Though *ἀνὴρ* might include members of both sexes, it is highly unlikely that it does here.<sup>5</sup>

On the basis of this evidence, admittedly scanty, it does not seem unreasonable to conclude that: (1) any charismatic ministry women may have had was not of an itinerant nature, (2) in the organization of the church women did not take places of leadership as bishops and deacons, and (3) the organization of the church had not yet reached the stage where it included a definite and official order of deaconesses.

## II. CLEMENT OF ROME

From both the internal and external evidence the probable date of Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians is 96 A. D. just after the Domitian persecution.<sup>6</sup> In this letter are two passages which speak of the duties of the ordinary Christian woman. The first concerns

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<sup>4</sup> Didaché 11:12.

<sup>5</sup> But cf. Bauer, op. cit., pp. 120-21, who does not admit this meaning. Further, the Apostolic Constitutions must have understood deacons as including men only since deaconesses are mentioned as a separate group.

<sup>6</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., I, I, 346.



household affairs:

. . . and the women ye charged to perform all their duties in a blameless and seemly and pure conscience, cherishing their own husbands, as is meet; and ye taught them to keep in the rule of obedience, and to manage the affairs of their household in seemliness, with all discretion.<sup>7</sup>

The second shows "the attention the writer and the church pay to the conduct of women and young men, and to the Christian education of children."<sup>8</sup>

Let us guide our women toward that which is good: let them show forth their lovely disposition of purity; let them prove their sincere affection of gentleness; let them make manifest the moderation of their tongue through their silence . . . . Let our children be partakers of the instruction which is in Christ. . . .<sup>9</sup>

This is the clearest picture in all the writings of this period of what should be the character and work of a Christian woman.

### III. IGNATIUS

In the writings of Ignatius are found several important references bearing on the subject. There is general agreement that the martyrdom of Ignatius took place during the reign of Trajan (98-117) and probably not before the year 108.<sup>10</sup> Seven letters are extant all

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<sup>7</sup> To the Corinthians 1.

<sup>8</sup> James Donaldson, The Apostolical Fathers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1874), p. 190.

<sup>9</sup> To the Corinthians 21.

<sup>10</sup> Streeter, op. cit., p. 276.

of which were written on his journey of martyrdom from Antioch where he was arrested to the place of his execution, Rome. Those to the Ephesians, Magnesians, Trallians, and Romans were written at Smyrna, while those to the churches at Philadelphia and Smyrna and one to Polycarp were written from Troas.

Two ideas dominate his writing. The first concerns the reality of the life and death of the Incarnate Son of God in opposition to the Docetic view so prevalent in early times. "It would be difficult for any theologian to have a greater horror of heretical teaching than Ignatius evinces in all his letters."<sup>11</sup> The other idea is his doctrine of the supremacy of the bishop in each church with its duty of implicit obedience to him.<sup>12</sup> However, there is no tinge of sacerdotal language in reference to the ministry nor any idea that the bishop rules autocratically. Obedience is enjoined as being due to presbyters and deacons as well,<sup>13</sup> and it is all for the sake of guaranteeing unity in the church. But in this development of ecclesiastical arrangements deaconesses are significantly absent. Nowhere are they mentioned.

Widows, however, do receive mention. To Polycarp, Ignatius says: "Let not widows be neglected. After the Lord be thou their

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<sup>11</sup> Charles Thomas Cruttwell, A Literary History of Early Christianity (London: Charles Griffin and Co., 1893), I, 89.

<sup>12</sup> To the Ephesians, 6; To the Magnesians, 6; To the Trallians, 2; To the Smyrnaeans, 8, 9; To the Philadelphians, 3.

<sup>13</sup> To Polycarp 6.

protector."<sup>14</sup> To the Smyrnaeans he wrote concerning those holding strange doctrine: "They have no care for love, none for the widow, none for the orphan, none for the afflicted, none for the prisoner, none for the hungry or thirsty."<sup>15</sup> But the most important passage is as follows:

Ἀσπάζομαι τοὺς οἴκους τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου σὺν γυναῖξιν καὶ τέκνοις, καὶ τὰς παρθένους τὰς λεγόμενας χήρας.  
I salute the households of my brethren with their wives and children, and the virgins who are called widows.<sup>16</sup>

Though this apparently seems to indicate that the order of widows was made up of those who were virgins or at least enrolled many such, Lightfoot's exegesis of this passage seems more historically accurate and therefore convincing. He says:

S. Paul however did not contemplate anything of the kind, for his directions point to widow-hood in the strictest sense, 1 Tim. v. 10 . . . . Moreover even at the beginning of the third century Tertullian treats it as a monstrous and unheard-of irregularity that a virgin has been admitted into the order of widows. . . . It seems therefore impossible that at any time when these epistles could have been written, the 'viduatus' should have been so largely composed of virgins as to explain the writer's language so interpreted. . . . Moreover with this interpretation we must suppose either that the *χρηρικοὶ* of Smyrna was wholly composed of virgins, or that Ignatius selected out of the order for salutation those only who had never been married. Either supposition would be inexplicable.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>15</sup> To the Smyrnaeans 6.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>17</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., II, II, 323.

In other words:

. . . it was customary to speak of those widows who maintained a chaste widow-hood as 'virgins a second time,' 'virgins in God's sight,' and the like; and . . . therefore the expression in Smyrn. 13 implies nothing more than that these persons, though widows in common designation and in outward condition, were virgins in heart and spirit.<sup>18</sup>

Thus we may conclude that there existed in Ignatius' time a recognized order of widows who were widows in the proper sense and not virgins following upon the pattern of the Pastoral Epistles.

One further passage demands attention.

Flee evil arts, or rather hold thou discourse about these. Tell my sisters to love the Lord and to be content with their husbands in flesh and in spirit. In like manner also charge my brothers in the name of Jesus Christ to love their wives, as the Lord loved the Church. If any one is able to abide in chastity to the honour of the flesh of the Lord, let him so abide without boasting. If he boast, he is lost; and if it be known beyond the bishop, he is polluted. It becometh men and women too, when they marry, to unite themselves with the consent of the bishop, that the marriage may be after the Lord and not after concupiscence.<sup>19</sup>

Although these injunctions are related to Ignatius' idea of the authority of the bishop, they are noteworthy in light of later developments in forbidding public profession of vows of chastity. Certainly, too, is no prominence given to asceticism.

From the references cited in Ignatius' letters these conclusions are evident: (1) The care of widows and orphans was a primary obligation of the church; (2) widows were probably enrolled as a class

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., II, I, 399-400.

<sup>19</sup> To Polycarp 5.

similar to the precepts of the Pastoral Epistles and as a group were considered devoted to God, virgins, that is, in His sight and service; (3) whatever their service might have been there is no confusion between widows, deaconesses,<sup>20</sup> and virgins;<sup>21</sup> (4) no preference is given to a celibate life.

#### IV. POLYCARP

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, whose martyrdom was about 155-156 A. D.<sup>22</sup> wrote at least the part of his Epistle to the Philippians in which relevant passages to our subject occur after the death of Ignatius circa 115.<sup>23</sup> Two previously observed conclusions plus one new fact are to be discovered in these passages. First of all, the obligation of the church to care for its widows is re-emphasized. "And the presbyters also must be compassionate, merciful towards all men, turning back the sheep that are gone astray, visiting all the infirm, not neglecting a widow or an orphan or a poor man . . . ."24 Next there is incidental mention of the wife of an erring presbyter which, because of

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<sup>20</sup> Even Miss Robinson who might desire to be biased affirms this. Cf. Cecilia Robinson, op. cit., pp. 55-56.

<sup>21</sup> According to Lightfoot's exegesis.

<sup>22</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., I, 96.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Streeter, op. cit., pp. 276-78 for detailed explanation.

<sup>24</sup> To the Philippians 6.

its naturalness, would preclude any idea of growing celibacy especially among the elders.<sup>25</sup> Finally, there is an important reference which gives the first indication of the function of widows.

Knowing therefore that we brought nothing into the world neither can we carry anything out, let us arm ourselves with the armour of righteousness, and let us teach ourselves first to walk in the commandment of the Lord; and then our wives also, to walk in the faith that hath been given unto them and in love and purity, cherishing their own husbands in all truth and loving all men equally and in all chastity, and to train their children in the training of the fear of God. Our widows must be sober-minded as touching the faith of the Lord, making intercession without ceasing for all men [ἐντυγχανούσας ἀδικείπτως περὶ πάντων], abstaining from all calumny, evil speaking, false witness, love of money, and every evil thing, knowing that they are God's altar [γυνωσκούσας ὅτι εἰσὶ θυσιαστήριον θεοῦ], and that all sacrifices are carefully inspected, and nothing escapeth Him either of their thoughts or intents or any secret things of the heart.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to the exhortation to wives similar to the one in Clement, there appear in this passage certain important facts concerning the widows. Their special work was that of interceding for all men. Further, they are termed the altar of God indicating that they were in some sense considered dedicated persons. There is certainly every indication here to believe with Lightfoot that Polycarp is "referring to the office or order of widows, both from the expressions used . . . and from the position which they occupy immediately before the deacons and priests."<sup>27</sup> It is not so evident, however, that there were in these

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>27</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., II, III, 329.

times two classes of widows: those who only received relief and those who in return for their maintenance undertook these duties and were enrolled in an ordo. It would seem from this passage that all widows were obliged to render the ministry of intercession.<sup>28</sup> Neither does this seem to be an innovation of Polycarp's day.

#### V. EPISTLE OF BARNABAS

There is little agreement as to the authorship and date of this epistle. Its composition must fall somewhere between 70 A. D., for it mentions the destruction of Jerusalem at this date, and 132 A. D. when the city was again destroyed but which is not mentioned.<sup>29</sup> For our purposes there is only one reference that needs to be cited. The writer in illustrating the "way of the Black One" says that followers of it pay "no heed to the widow and the orphan."<sup>30</sup> Here is another reminder of the care the church was expected to have for widows.

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<sup>28</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., II, II, 322 and Edwin Hatch, "Widows," A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities (London: John Murray, 1908), II, 2034 distinguish two classes of widows. The opposite viewpoint is supported by C. H. Turner, The Ministry of Women (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), p. 89.

<sup>29</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., I, 49.

<sup>30</sup> Epistle of Barnabas 20.



## VI. THE SHEPHERD OF HERMAS

Opinions concerning the date of this work vary from 100 to 140 A. D.<sup>31</sup> The manuscript evidence suggests that the first four visions were written and circulated prior to the rest of the document. Streeter calls Hermas the "White Rabbit" of the Apostolic Fathers (i.e. "his whole air suggests a total inability to say 'Bo!' to a goose."<sup>32</sup>) Nevertheless he also quite correctly says that "there is probably no document which reflects better the simplicity and genuine piety of the rank and file of the average church members . . . in the sub-apostolic age."<sup>33</sup>

In this document are further references to the importance of the church's caring for its widows.<sup>34</sup> In addition there are many precise statements relative to the conduct of Christians with emphasis on purity in marriage.<sup>35</sup> Purity in thought and heart is demanded toward one's wife. However, if a woman commits adultery the Christian husband should not remain with her, but neither should he remarry, for should

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<sup>31</sup> Cf. Streeter, op. cit., p. 204 and Crutwell, op. cit., I, 125.

<sup>32</sup> Streeter, op. cit., p. 203.

<sup>33</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>34</sup> Commandment 8 and Similitude V, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Commandment 4.

she repent, he is to take her back. The document breathes piety and morality and reiterates that which we have discovered in other writings of this period concerning women.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

In surveying these somewhat sketchy yet important references from the writings of the Apostolic Fathers certain conclusions stand out.

(1) More frequently than to any other subject reference is made to the matter of the church's responsibility for the care of its widows. It is difficult to see a distinction between enrolled and unenrolled widows; probably all who received ministrations of the church were expected to minister in return by interceding for all men. Deaconesses do not appear as a group, and it is certainly contradictory to all the evidence to confuse or equate praying widows with the office of deaconess.

(2) The writings teach a high standard of moral conduct. The Shepherd of Hermas makes it clear that this standard applied to marriage was far higher than heathen practice.

(3) No ascetic strain or preference to the celibate life appears anywhere in these writings.

(4) In the writings of Polycarp and Clement are suggestions that an important work of Christian women in these times was the proper training of their children.

## CHAPTER X

### APOLOGETIC, APOCRYPHAL, AND NON-CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

Turning from the Apostolic Fathers it is necessary next to consider the literature of the Apologists, some apocryphal writings, and two references in heathen writers which bear upon the status of women during this period.

#### I. THE APOLOGISTS

Cruttwell succinctly analyzes the character of the environment in which the apologists wrote under four principles which opposed Christianity.

The first antagonistic principle was Judaism, from which Christianity sprang; the second was Philosophy, or the effort of the human spirit to win its own way to truth; the third was Paganism, by which we are to understand the manifold religions of the nations; the fourth was the attitude of the secular power, which was based on the apotheosis of Caesar and the omnipotence of the State.<sup>1</sup>

In their attempt to meet these challenges certain lines relevant to the present subject are evident throughout their writings. Rather than consider each apologist individually and separately, one proposes in this instance to trace these lines in their writings.

#### Status of Christian women contrasted with that of heathen women.

The most prominent strain in these writings which is relevant to the thesis is the oft-repeated and insistent contrast between Christian and

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<sup>1</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., I, 257.

heathen women. The higher standards and stricter conduct with relation to Christian women is constantly used as an apologetic for the truth of the Christian message. Sometimes the argument proceeds on the basis of a consideration of Greek theogony. Justin Martyr (110?-164?) in his Discourse to the Greeks calls it a "drivelling theogony" and cites cases of the devouring of children, ravishing of women, and unchastity.<sup>2</sup> These shameless practices are to be found among Greek mortals as well who are accused of indulging "as a common practice in wicked and insane fornication."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Justin's words imply that it is precisely because of religious beliefs that these practices abound. He says:

And this further I would say to you, why are you, being a Greek, indignant at your son when he imitates Jupiter, and rises against you and defrauds you of your own wife? . . . And why do you blame your wife for living in unchastity, and yet honour Venus with shrines?<sup>4</sup>

Likewise Tatian (110-180?) makes a sweeping condemnation in his Address to the Greeks saying, "You behave yourselves unbecomingly in what relates to woman."<sup>5</sup> The contrast in the practice of Christian women is well stated by Athenagoras in his Apology written 176 or 177:

But we are so far from practising promiscuous intercourse, that it is not lawful among us to indulge even a lustful look. "For,"

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter II.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter IV.

<sup>4</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter XXXIII.

saith He, "he that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery in his heart. . . . On behalf of those, then, to whom we apply the names of brothers and sisters, and other designations of relationship, we exercise the greatest care that their bodies should remain undefiled and uncorrupted."<sup>6</sup>

Justin echoes the same words and further adds a prohibition against second marriages.<sup>7</sup> Though not as a contrast to heathen practice, Justin also makes mention, as was so often the case in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, of the church's care of its widows, for he relates that the custom was to receive a collection after the weekly Eucharistic celebration which was deposited with the president who in turn "succours the orphans and widows."<sup>8</sup>

The Epistle to Diognetus which was formerly ascribed to Justin and which may be dated about 150 also speaks of the contrastingly higher standards of Christians who are described by the writer thus: "They marry like all other men and they beget children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have their meals in common, but not their wives."<sup>9</sup> Sufficient examples have been adduced to show not only the stress the apologists placed on this point but also to show the higher regard in which Christianity held women in contrast to heathen practice.

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter XXXII.

<sup>7</sup> Apology I, chapter XV.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., chapter LXVII.

<sup>9</sup> Chapter V.

Teaching concerning marriage. The second strain running throughout these writings concerns matters related to marriage. Of course, all that has been said above concerning the high standard of Christian morality is pertinent. However, this standard led to the conception that marriage is only for the purpose of begetting children. Justin says: "But whether we marry, it is only that we may bring up children; or whether we decline marriage, we live continently."<sup>10</sup> Athenagoras explicitly relates such a practice to Christian doctrine:

Therefore, having the hope of eternal life, we despise the things of this life, even to the pleasures of the soul, each of reckoning her his wife whom he has married according to the laws laid down by us, and that only for the purpose of having children. For as the husbandman throwing the seed into the ground awaits the harvest, not sowing more upon it, so to us the procreation of children is the measure of our indulgence in appetite.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, the idea of a life relationship of love in marriage is not totally absent for genial Theophilus (who died about 181) in discussing why Eve was formed out of Adam's rib declares: "And God made the woman together with the man, not only that thus the mystery of God's sole government might be exhibited, but also that their mutual affection might be greater."<sup>12</sup> However, the beginnings of an ascetic

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<sup>10</sup> Apology I, chapter XXIX.

<sup>11</sup> Apology, chapter XXXIII.

<sup>12</sup> Theophilus to Antolycus, Book II, chapter XXVIII.

strain in Christian teaching are clearly evident in the period of the apologists.

Celibacy. The question naturally arises: Is there any positive evidence that would lead us to the conclusion that preference began at least to be given to the celibate life? Cadoux would answer with a resounding yes, for he says:

Perhaps the most significant feature in the Christian thought of the time on the subject is the largely increased emphasis that is laid on the value and virtue of celibacy, virginity, and abstinence from sexual intercourse on the part of married persons.<sup>13</sup>

According to the fragments from the lost works of Tatian he taught that all sexual connection was impure and condemned and rejected all marriage, but Tatian is known to have come under the influence of Gnosticism and to have founded an ascetic sect called the Encratites.<sup>14</sup>

Athenagoras, who, on the other hand, falls into the orthodox circle, said this: "Nay, you would find many among us, both men and women, growing old unmarried, in the hope of living in closer communion with God."<sup>15</sup> This can hardly be construed as giving preference to celibacy, for he adds immediately that this is only an alternate state to being married provided that the marriage is only for the first time.

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<sup>13</sup> Cecil John Cadoux, The Early Church and The World (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1925), p. 282.

<sup>14</sup> Fragments III and IX.

<sup>15</sup> Apology, chapter XXXIII.



Clearer evidence to support preference being given to celibacy is to be found in the correspondence between Dionysius, bishop of Corinth and Pinytus, bishop of Gnosus in Crete, written about 170. Dionysius exhorted Pinytus not to make chastity compulsory but to regard human infirmity. In reply, Pinytus asks him to impart stronger food the next time he writes that his people may be fed with more perfect doctrine.<sup>16</sup> We cannot be certain from the nature of Eusebius' account exactly all that may have been in Dionysius' mind, but it seems clear that there was a tendency to give preference to the celibate life.

## II. APOCRYPHAL LITERATURE

One of the most interesting stories in the apocryphal literature of the first three centuries is contained in the Acta Pauli et Theklæ. Indeed, it "is the only extant literary work which throws light on the character of popular Christianity in Asia Minor"<sup>17</sup> during the earlier part of this period. It appears in an Armenian, Syriac, Latin, and Greek version of which the first two represent the purest text. Lightfoot calls the work "a known forgery of the later decades of the second century,"<sup>18</sup> but Ramsay's archaeological investigations leads him to the

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<sup>16</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book IV, chapter 23. Eusebius evidently considered Pinytus's views to be orthodox.

<sup>17</sup> Ramsay, The Church in the Roman Empire, p. 375.

<sup>18</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., II, I, 623n.

conclusion that:

We are carried back to the first century, and to a writer who remembered at least the local surroundings, the actual characters (Paul's appearance, Tryphaena), and the species of charges made about A. D. 50-64. Finally, we consider that the easiest supposition is that Thekla was a real person, and her actual fortunes were related by the original author, with perhaps a certain amount of selection and idealisation.<sup>19</sup>

Comparison of the Armenian version which was made from an earlier Syriac version at the beginning of the fifth century confirms that in these Acts "we have at the bottom a document written well before the end of the first century."<sup>20</sup>

Briefly, the story relates Paul's visit to Iconium where he preached in the house of Onesimus. Thekla, a rich young maiden, overheard his words from a window of her house and at once resolved to follow Paul's teaching and to devote herself to a life of perpetual virginity. Her mother, being vexed at this because she had betrothed Thekla to a rich young man named Thamyris, had the authorities scourge Paul and cast him out of the town. But Thekla follows Paul to Antioch where she is met by Alexander who was giving a show of wild beasts to the inhabitants of that city. When he tries to kiss Thekla she resists and tears his garments. For this, she is condemned to be thrown to the beasts, but at this point she is befriended by Queen Tryphaena who eventually adopts her.

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<sup>19</sup> Ramsay, op. cit., p. 414.

<sup>20</sup> F. C. Conybeare, Monuments of Early Christianity (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1896), p. 54.

Teaching concerning chastity is outstanding in the narrative.

Paul is supposed to have said:

Blessed are they that keep the flesh chaste, for they shall become the temple of God.<sup>21</sup>

Blessed are the bodies of the virgins, for they shall be well-pleasing unto God and shall not lose the reward of their chastity . . . .<sup>22</sup>

Thamyris accused Paul of being the one "who gives the commandment that there be no marriages at all."<sup>23</sup> Demas and Hermogenes, who accompanied Paul but who according to the account were secretly opposed to Paul, agreed with Thamyris that Paul is the one who "separates the young men from the virgins and the virgins from the young men, and declares that you cannot rise from the dead unless you maintain yourself in chastity."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Thekla's own action exalts and adorns this teaching concerning virginity. Though many of the episodes in the story are without any doubt untrue, still this evident exaltation of virginity permeates the account.

In addition to championing virginity, Thekla also claimed the right to baptize having received such a commandment from the Lord

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<sup>21</sup> Section 5.

<sup>22</sup> Section 6.

<sup>23</sup> Section 11.

<sup>24</sup> Section 12.

Himself.<sup>25</sup> This claim is evidently not a Montanist addition of the second century but was presented in the oldest form of the text.<sup>26</sup> However, it was a claim made for Thekla alone and not for Christian women or any class of them in general.<sup>27</sup>

Also to be included in this discussion of apocryphal writings are certain works which definitely represent the bias of error in certain sects in the early church. These actually contribute very little to the principal emphasis of this thesis.

Gnostic teaching is seen in the Acts of Andrew. In this work which probably belongs to the third century (c. 260?)<sup>28</sup> women who become Christians abstain from sexual relations with their husbands.<sup>29</sup> The Ebionite sect is represented in the Clementine Homilies and Recognitions. Though not commonly classed among the apocryphal Acts, the

<sup>25</sup> Section 40.

<sup>26</sup> Conybeare, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

<sup>27</sup> In Tertullian's time Thekla's example was evidently being used to give liberty to other women to baptize, for Tertullian writes: "But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul's name, claim Thekla's example as a licence for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that, in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing, as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from a love of Paul, was removed from his office" (On Baptism, 17).

<sup>28</sup> Montague Rhodes James, translator, Apocryphal New Testament (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1924), p. 337.

<sup>29</sup> Sections 4-8.

story is of the same romantic character. Hort believes the Homilies to be an Eastern version and the Recognitions a Western version of a common original document dating from about the beginning of the third century.<sup>30</sup> Since the Ebionites rejected the authority and writings of St. Paul, it is not surprising to find in the Homilies, which preserves more of this Ebionite polemic than the Recognitions, an evident dislike of asceticism. The plot is actually built around a family unit with emphasis on the chaste loyalty of the family to each other.<sup>31</sup> Peter is supposed to have said (and there is no reason to believe that this represents the belief of the church in the east):

The chaste wife does not expect to be caressed, recognises her husband as her lord, bears his poverty when he is poor, is hungry with him when he is hungry, travels with him when he travels, consoles him when he is grieved, and if she have a large dowry, is subject to him as if she had nothing at all.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, in contrast to Paul, marriage is enjoined on all,<sup>33</sup> but in spite of opposition to Pauline doctrine there appears this subordination of the position of women. Indeed, we may say inferiority for the female

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<sup>30</sup> Fenton John Anthony Hort, Clementine Recognitions (London: Macmillan and Co., 1901), pp. 80-87. Cf. Lightfoot, op. cit., I, I, 414.

<sup>31</sup> Homily XIII, chapters 13-19.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., chapter 18.

<sup>33</sup> Homily III, chapter 68.

sex is used as an illustration of ignorance and imperfection.<sup>34</sup> Since these ideas do appear in this writing, it would seem that the church got them from other than a Pauline source.

Also from a Syrian source come two Epistles on Virginity ascribed to Clement of Rome. These seem to represent Catholic teaching but only in the East. The date of these letters is highly debatable which fact makes it difficult to place much weight on their contents. Lightfoot believes that they should be placed in the third century (which is later than many critics place it)<sup>35</sup> while another writer believes that they cannot be "earlier than the seventh century" and actually "they may be much later."<sup>36</sup> The letters are addressed to both male and female virgins exalting the purpose of virginity and giving in detail the proper conduct of one who has espoused such an estate. To such ones, according to these letters, God has promised a better place than the place of "those who have passed a wedded life in sanctity."<sup>37</sup> If they are third century writings they undoubtedly show that there was a growing preference given to the celibate life in the churches of the East.

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<sup>34</sup> Homily II, chapter 15.

<sup>35</sup> Lightfoot, op. cit., I, I, 407.

<sup>36</sup> J. M. Cotterill, Modern Criticism and Clement's Epistles to Virgins (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1884), p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> Epistle I, chapter 4.

### III. NON-CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

Two references, both of the second century, are of importance among the non-Christian literature of the first three centuries. In 112 Trajan sent Pliny to be governor of the province of Bithynia in northwest Asia Minor. He was a perfect underling, and when any decision had to be made he wrote back to Trajan for advice. Because of Trajan's ban on secret societies or collegia Pliny found it necessary to consult the emperor when he discovered Christian societies spreading. In his letter he writes:

So I thought it the more necessary to inquire into the real truth of the matter by subjecting to torture two female slaves, who were called deacons [quae ministrae dicebantur]; but I found nothing more than a perverse superstition which went beyond all bounds.<sup>38</sup>

Since ministra is the word which the Vulgate uses to translate  $\delta\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\omicron\varsigma$  in referring to Phoebe in Romans 16:1, it is very likely that these two female slaves were known in their own Greek-speaking communities by the Greek word  $\delta\acute{\alpha}\kappa\omicron\nu\omicron\varsigma$ . However, it is equally unlikely that they had any officially-designated capacity in the organization of the church. That they were more than servants would not be easy to prove; there is certainly no hint of an ordained or official female deaconate. This is, nonetheless, the first reference outside the New Testament to women ministers. It is significant, too, in showing that in this early time there was no confusion between virgins, widows, and

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<sup>38</sup> Epistle 96.



deaconesses or servants. These classes are clearly distinct in all the references cited up to now.

Likewise, up to this point the only active ministry expected of widows was that of intercession. From the very beginning the church expected to care for its widows and to the very end of the Ante-Nicene period this was carefully done. In the enumeration of the numbers on the staff of the Roman church by Pope Cornelius in his letter to Fabius of Antioch about 250 A. D. there are listed:

. . . forty-six presbyters, seven deacons, seven sub-deacons, forty-two acoluthi (clerks), exorcists, readers, and janitors, in all fifty-two: widows, with the afflicted and needy, more than fifteen hundred: all which the goodness and love of God doth support and nourish.<sup>39</sup>

Active ministry does not seem to be in the province of these widows even in this latest reference.

There is, however, a reference by a heathen writer of the second century which might be plausibly interpreted as implying active duties on the part of widows. In Lucian's account of the wanderings of the philosopher-quack Proteus Peregrinus, Proteus, who for a time joined the Christians, is thrown into prison. The Christians, says Lucian,

. . . left no stone unturned in their endeavour to procure his release. When this proved impossible, they looked after his wants in all other matters with untiring solicitude and devotion. From earliest dawn old women ('widows,' they are called) and orphan children might be seen waiting about the prison-doors; while the officers of the church, by bribing the jailors, were able to spend the

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<sup>39</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book VI, chapter 43.

night inside with him. Meals were brought in, and they went through their sacred formulas.<sup>40</sup>

It might be concluded that here the widows were the agents of administering the charities toward this prisoner, but a closer examination of the record does not lead to this conclusion. The collocation of "orphan children" with "widows" suggests simply that the recipients of charity from the church massed themselves by the prison to demonstrate their sympathies by their presence and prayers. It is certainly clear that the order of widows is distinguished from the group called "officers of the church." Furthermore, no other evidence supports the idea of active ministry on the part of the widows from beginning to the end of this period. Lucian's reference is rather to what might be called today a sympathy demonstration.

Thus, from these writings one may conclude that the three classes, widows, deaconesses, virgins, are distinct and separate through this period. Widows are to be cared for by the church and in return exercise the ministry of intercession. There seem to be no official deaconesses though women, other than widows, did minister in the sense of serving. Virginity is put forth as an alternate and in some cases a more desirable state than that of marriage though the preference to celibacy appears mostly in the literature of the sects of the day. Of the three classes widows are undoubtedly the most prominent.

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<sup>40</sup> Lucian, Death of Peregrinus, 12.

There is, too, the continued emphasis on the superiority of the standard and conduct of life of Christian women in comparison with heathen women.

## CHAPTER XI

### CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

Relatively little is known of the life of Titus Flavius Clemens who has been called "the most original spirit in the whole Ante-Nicene Church."<sup>1</sup> He may have been a descendant of some freedman of Flavius Clemens the cousin of Domitian, consul in 95. Born circa 150, the son of heathen parents, he sought truth in Greece, Italy, and the East where he studied under divers teachers "before he lighted on the last and best of them lying hidden at Alexandria . . . Pantaenus."<sup>2</sup> He became a presbyter of the church at Alexandria and succeeded Pantaenus as head of the catechetical school. "The period during which Clement presided over the catechetical school (c. A. D. 190-203) seems to have been the season of his greatest literary activity."<sup>3</sup>

At the outbreak of the persecution under Severus (202) Clement left Alexandria and evidently never returned. The last mention of him is in a letter written about 211,<sup>4</sup> but the time and place of his death are unknown. He has not been reckoned among the saints of the church,

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<sup>1</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., II, 439.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Melvill Gwatkin, Early Church History (London: Macmillan and Co., 1927), II, 163.

<sup>3</sup> Brooke Foss Westcott, "Clement of Alexandria," A Dictionary of Christian Biography (London: John Murray, 1877), I, 560.

<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, VI, 11.

and with very few and minor exceptions "his posthumous history has been like his life, peaceful, honourable, and obscure."<sup>5</sup>

# I. CLEMENT'S TIMES

The era in which Clement lived and wrote was a time of transition. Bishop Westcott correctly says:

In order to understand Clement rightly, it is necessary to bear constantly in mind that he laboured in a crisis of transition. . . . The transition which Clement strove more or less consciously to deal with was threefold, affecting doctrine, thought, and life. Doctrine was passing from the stage of oral tradition to written definition . . . . Thought was passing from the immediate circle of the Christian revelation to the whole domain of human experience . . . . Life in its fulness was coming to be apprehended as the object of Christian discipline.<sup>6</sup>

In this period of transition Clement appears in the role of a Christian philosopher who finds a true philosophy in Christ. The rise of Gnosticism which subordinated religion to philosophy alarmed pious Christians of the time with the result that "the simpler sort of Christians would now have nothing to do with philosophy or logic, and looked on learning generally as little else than a hindrance to piety."<sup>7</sup> The Stromata, though unmethodical, are inspired with one thought; i.e.,

. . . to claim for the gospel the power of fulfilling all the desires of men and of raising to a supreme unity all the objects of

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Bigg, The Christian Platonists of Alexandria (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1913), p. 319.

<sup>6</sup> Westcott, op. cit., I, 565.

<sup>7</sup> Gwatkin, op. cit., II, 167.

knowledge, is the soul of the true gnostic--the perfect Christian philosopher.<sup>8</sup>

Gnostic, then, becomes the Christian's highest title of honor, and philosophy, even with its imperfections which Clement recognizes full well, a true preparation for Christianity. Just as the law was given to the Jews as a preparation for the Gospel, so philosophy was given to the Greeks for the same reason. Human learning, then, has a use in things divine, for Clement conceived the cure of error as not being less knowledge but more. "Hence he strenuously asserted, not only the merits of Philosophy in the past, but its continuous necessity in the Church."<sup>9</sup>

Gnosticism, of which Alexandria was a hotbed in those days, erred in endeavoring to combine evangelical truth with alien beliefs. Clement, on the other hand, is careful to maintain the supreme value of revelation, and, though philosophical in his outlook and giving philosophy importance in his approach, he is above all else a Christian.

Harnack has well said:

It is a new man that he appears, one who has pressed on through the whole range of philosophy, through authority and speculation, through all the externals of religion, to the glorious liberty of the children of God. His faith in Providence, his faith in Christ, his doctrine of freedom, his ethics--everything is expressed in

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<sup>8</sup> Westcott, op. cit., I, 562.

<sup>9</sup> Bigg, op. cit., p. 79.

language that betrays the Greek, and yet everything is new and genuinely Christian.<sup>10</sup>

As a result Clement's ideal Gnostic is as different from the ideal of the Gnostics as day is from night, for the true Gnostic not only seeks to avoid sin in all its forms but does so from the very highest motive, love of God.

This conflict with Gnosticism is seen clearly in Clement's consideration of the status of women, for he was confronted in Gnosticism by two extreme points of view. Carpocrates, a Gnostic teacher of Alexandria, had a son, Epiphanes, who, before he died at the age of seventeen, wrote a book entitled On Justice. In this book he maintained that God's order was community on equal terms.<sup>11</sup> On the basis that the sunlight and stars of the heavens above were common to all men without distinction he argues that all restrictions in regard to marriage ought to be removed, since community on equal terms was conceived as being valid in this realm also. The advocates of this "Free Love" claimed that their licentious habits were in reality mystical communion and allowable on the basis of the doctrine that the soul must pass through every experience before obtaining final liberty and salvation.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Adolf Harnack, What is Christianity? (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), p. 219.

<sup>11</sup> Stromata, III, chapter II.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., III, chapter IV.



Sometimes these people were found:

using arguments from Scripture, e. g. "Give to every one that asketh of thee;" sometimes relying on the Stoic principle that sex relationships were among the things indifferent; but specially establishing itself on the Platonic Community of Women, which indeed was frequently misrepresented as justifying indiscriminate licence.<sup>13</sup>

Clement's answer to such views is chiefly along the line that whatever else such a community might be it was certainly not Christian.

At the opposite extreme, forbidding all marriage, stood followers of Marcion, Tatian the Assyrian, and Julius Cassianus. They called marriage by such terms as fornication and corruption and related their insistence on abstinence from marriage to their doctrine of the creation of the world by an inferior Creator and not by the supreme God.<sup>14</sup> To support this view, its adherents often quoted two sayings attributed to the Lord. The first was His answer to a question put by Salome, "How long shall death have power?" To this He is supposed to have replied, "So long as you women bear."<sup>15</sup> On another occasion the Lord is supposed to have said that He came "to destroy the works of the female sex."<sup>16</sup> Obviously, given these premises that the world is the work of an evil power and that the begetting of children is, as it were,

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<sup>13</sup> R. B. Tollinton, Clement of Alexandria (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), I, 276.

<sup>14</sup> Stromata, III, chapters III and V. Cf. also Gwatkin, op. cit., II, 67-8.

<sup>15</sup> Stromata, III, chapter VI.

<sup>16</sup> Stromata, III, chapter IX.

feeding death, then the conclusion that the ascetic life is best naturally follows. Clement, as we shall see, is not without his leanings towards asceticism, but he emphatically rules out this view of enforced celibacy.

One might rightly question whether Clement's thoughts on these matters are in any way linked to his anthropology and specifically to his conception of the fall of man. Actually Clement says very little about the fall and even less by way of connecting his conception with his views on the status of women. Reference will be made to what he says about the nature of woman as well as his views on the woman given as an "help" to man, but these ideas are not rooted in or especially linked with his doctrine of the fall. Indeed, that doctrine in Clement is

little more than a useless excrescence on his theology, only of significance in so far as the fact that he does not feel able to ignore it altogether may be regarded as testifying to the measure of acceptance which it had already won in contemporary Christian thought.<sup>17</sup>

There is, however, one passage which is of interest in this connection. In defending marriage against the attacks of Julius Cassianus who was attempting to show from 2 Corinthians 11:3 that Paul disapproved of marital relations, Clement comments on the nature of the first sin.

For (human) generation is a created thing and a creation of the Almighty, who assuredly would never depress the soul from a better to a worse state. Nay, rather was it the case that the Saviour came

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<sup>17</sup> Norman Powell Williams, The Ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1927), p. 208.

unto us who had gone astray as to our minds, which had been corrupted as the result of the disobedience committed by us, pleasure-loving as we were, against the commandments; the first-formed man, perchance, having anticipated our season and before the time of the grace of matrimony having experienced desire and committed sin (for 'every one that looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already,' not waiting the season of the Divine will).<sup>18</sup>

Clement here suggests that the nature of the first sin is to be found rooted in lust which led to the premature union of Adam and Eve before the proper season and before the grace of matrimony had been given to man. In other words, God condemned "not the appetite, but the unwillingness to wait for the time when the satisfaction of the appetite will have become legitimate."<sup>19</sup> One wishes that Clement had linked this statement not only with a negative attack on the Gnostics but also with his own more positive conception of marriage, for one will always wonder if this tendency to assign a sexual character to the first sin might not be related to Clement's leanings toward asceticism which are evident in other instances. However, we must not presume on his silence and further than this we are unable to go because of the relatively small place he gives to anthropology.

As Westcott pointed out there was not only a doctrinal background in the thought of Clement's day but there was also a movement to bring all of life under Christian discipline. To this end the Paedagogus was written. Clement himself says that his aim in this work is to

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<sup>18</sup> Stromata, III, chapter 14.

<sup>19</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 205.

"compendiously describe what the man who is called a Christian ought to be during the whole of his life."<sup>20</sup> In the accomplishment of this he is obliged to give minute instruction for guidance in everything that affects the child of God, including the duties and position of women. Sometimes the discussion becomes unreservedly frank, though never coarse, in the disclosure of intimate details of the relationship of the sexes. Even Clement is aware that his frankness may cause surprise in his readers, but he justifies it by the remark that what God has made may be named without disgrace.<sup>21</sup>

James Donaldson, who, along with Alexander Roberts, decided to present certain parts of the Paedagogus in Latin when editing the Ante-Nicene Library because of this frankness, infers from it that notions in regard to women were "more degraded" than in the time of Christ.<sup>22</sup> Though he admits that ". . . in the case of Clement no one can doubt the purity and simplicity of his mind, and his expositions, though they have been denounced by some divines, are absolutely devoid of all pruriency"<sup>23</sup> still he uses these portions from Clement to support his contention that Christianity, apart from the point of its initial introduction into history, did not favor "the extension of woman's

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<sup>20</sup> Paedagogus, II, chapter I.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., II, chapter X.

<sup>22</sup> Donaldson, Woman, op. cit., p. 148.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

freedom."<sup>24</sup> Perhaps what Clement says about women might be adduced as proof that their position was actually lower in Christianity than in the heathen world--whether this is so or not will become clear from the remainder of this chapter--but the fact that he said certain things about women and in great detail does not in itself prove that Christians' notions of them were more degraded.

Why, then, did Clement write thus? One may detect two motives at work in these passages. First of all, the Museum at Alexandria was a center of medical science.

Indeed, no physicians in the world had quite the same repute as those who had prepared for their calling in this school. There was small chance in Alexandria of bad drugs passing muster. So medical students found their way from all parts to share the training of the university.<sup>25</sup>

Clement, affected by this element in his environment, speaks of such things as the supposed tendency of beans to prevent conception,<sup>26</sup> and the effect of summer and winter on the supply of a woman's milk.<sup>27</sup>

Tollinton has well said that:

. . . in each case what strikes the reader is Clement's considerable knowledge of a subject not properly his own. There is no unclean curiosity. Nor is the moral purpose always in his mind. But he is here, as ever, πολυμαθής, the man athirst for knowledge,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

<sup>25</sup> Tollinton, op. cit., I, 43.

<sup>26</sup> Stromata, III, chapter III.

<sup>27</sup> Paedagogus, I, chapter VI.

betraying, among quaint allegorical interpretations and much genuine religion, the same instinct for concrete realities, which existed earlier in Aristotle and has since characterised the modern man of science. Had it been Clement's lot to be a physician instead of a theologian, his interest in his profession, in research rather than in practice, would have been genuine indeed.<sup>28</sup>

The second motive is Clement's genuine interest in the moral welfare of his hearers. Although it may be debated how far it is of moral gain to speak so openly and frankly on such matters, there can be no doubt that Clement sincerely has in mind throughout the needs of the catechumens. Certainly the dominating ethics of Alexandria were non-Christian. This fact demanded for new converts not only the inculcation of general principles of Christianity but also definite teaching regarding everyday life.

Many of the precepts which seem to us trifling or superfluous were no doubt called forth by antagonism to the immorality or irreligion with which they were associated. If any justification for his procedure is necessary, it is justified by the consideration that the strength of paganism, from the glamour of which the converts were only just emancipated, lay not so much in its religious conceptions, which could easily be overthrown by arguments, as in the social customs which were an inseparable element in it. . . . A code of practical ethics, with suggestions, so to speak, on Christian etiquette, was a necessary part of the equipment of the Greek who had entered upon the career of a Christian citizen. From the nature of the case it was inevitable that emphasis should be placed on the restrictions imposed by their Christian profession, rather than on its liberties. Clement certainly did not err in insisting on the necessary relation between the dogmatic and the ethical side of Christianity, or in making the attainment of truth in its highest form depend on the realisation of the moral ideal in every relation of life as its essential prerequisite.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Tollinton, op. cit., I, 273-4.

<sup>29</sup> John Patrick, Clement of Alexandria (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1914), p. 13.

In the Paedagogus, then, is the attempt to bring all of life under Christian discipline, and in the Stromata the transition of thought from the realm of revelation to the whole domain of human experience is manifested. One would rightly expect that in such works much would be said about the place of women; thus we turn from this necessary consideration of Clement's times to consider specifically those passages in his writings which bear on the status of women in his day.

## II. CLEMENT'S VIEWS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Since Clement's writings are the largest belonging to that early period it is not surprising to find that on this subject he has much to say. Often his remarks are tedious, occasionally it is not easy to reconcile Clement to himself, but nothing that he says on this subject is without interest. He considered the subject important to the ordinary believer as well as to the more advanced one--the Christian Gnostic in his terminology,<sup>30</sup> and the many references show how practical was his theology and how human was the theologian.

Gwatkin observes that "we do not even know whether he had a wife."<sup>31</sup> Tollinton, on the other hand, feels that the proper exegesis of a passage in the Paedagogus definitely argues for the existence of a

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<sup>30</sup> Paedagogus III, chapter VIII and Stromata, VII, chapter XII.

<sup>31</sup> Gwatkin, op. cit., II, 162.



wife.<sup>32</sup> Whether or not this interpretation be correct, Tollinton's further observation doubtless is:

. . . there are a good many other references to married life, which certainly support the belief that it had formed a not unhappy part of Clement's own experience. . . . [They] all suggest that the writer knew these things more intimately than the mere onlooker can ever do.<sup>33</sup>

All material pertinent to this subject is found in the Paedagogus and the Stromata, which have been discussed in general. Clement does refer to a treatise of his on Marriage<sup>34</sup> which may have been a separate work now lost or which may have been a part of the Stromata.<sup>35</sup> However, references from extant sources may be classified under three headings.

Relation of female to male. In Clement's mind men and women are in certain respects equal. These respects are those things of the

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<sup>32</sup> Tollinton, op. cit., I, 271. The passage is in Book III, chapter XI. It is as follows: καλὸν μὲν οὖν ταῖς γαμεταῖς πεπιστευκότας ταῖς σφῶν τοὺς ἄνδρας τὴν οἰκουρίαν αὐταῖς ἐπιτρέπειν βοηθοῖς εἰς τοῦτο δεδομέναις. εἰ δὲ ἄρα δεοὶ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἐμπολιτευομένους καὶ ἄλλας τινὰς τῶν κατ' ἄγρὸν διοικουμένων πράξεις, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ ἄνευ γυναικῶν γεγομένους, ὑπὲρ ἀσφαλείας ἀποσφραγίσσασθαι τινα, δίδωσιν καὶ ἡμῖν εἰς τοῦτο μόνον σημαντήρα. Tollinton understands καὶ ἡμᾶς as referring to husbands and including Clement; he further translates πολλάκις ἄνευ γυναικῶν γεγομένους "being in many cases unmarried men" and not, as is usually done, "being frequently absent from our wives."

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., I, 271-72.

<sup>34</sup> Paedagogus, III, chapter VIII.

<sup>35</sup> Book III.

spirit in which male and female may be true equals. Clement says:

And one aim and one end, as far as regards perfection, being demonstrated to belong to the man and the woman, Peter in his epistle says, "Though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations. . . ."36

Women are therefore to philosophize equally with men, though the males are best at everything, unless they have become effeminate. To the whole human race, then, discipline and virtue are a necessity, if they would pursue after happiness. And how recklessly Euripides writes variously! On one occasion, "For every wife is inferior to her husband, though the most excellent one marry her that is of fair fame." And on another: "For the chaste is her husband's slave, while she that is unchaste in her folly despises her consort. . . . For nothing is better and more excellent, than when as husband and wife ye keep house, harmonious in your sentiments."37

He is clearly opposed to Euripide's idea that a wife is inferior to her husband; indeed, an entire chapter<sup>38</sup> is devoted to demonstrating that women as well as men may share in perfection. In proof of this Clement cites the examples of Judith, Esther, the modesty of Theano, the fleetness of Atlantaea, the devotion of Alcestis, the simplicity of Sarah, and the domestic ministry of Nausicaa in the Odyssey. Furthermore, this equality in attaining perfection is especially evident in martyrdom.

But as it is noble for a man to die for virtue, and for liberty, and for himself, so also is it for a woman. For this is not peculiar to the nature of males, but to the nature of the good. . . . So we know that both children, and women, and servants have often,

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<sup>36</sup> Stromata, IV, chapter XX.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., IV, chapter VIII.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., IV, chapter XIX.

against their fathers', and masters', and husbands' will, reached the highest degree of excellence.<sup>39</sup>

Nevertheless, there is also a fundamental difference in nature between male and female which Clement recognizes. In speaking of the shame of drunkenness he mentions it quite incidentally but definitely: "For nothing disgraceful is proper for man, who is endowed with reason; much less for woman, to whom it brings shame even to reflect of what nature she is."<sup>40</sup> This difference in nature is elaborated when he says:

We do not say that woman's nature is the same as man's, as she is woman. For undoubtedly it stands to reason that some difference should exist between each of them in virtue of which one is male and the other female. Pregnancy and parturition, accordingly, we say belong to woman, as she is woman, and not as she is a human being. But if there were no difference between man and woman, both would do and suffer the same things.<sup>41</sup>

Again, quoting Luke 20:34 "they marry, and are given in marriage," he says, ". . . in which alone the female is distinguished from the male."<sup>42</sup> Such a statement has led Tollinton to understand that Clement believed that "the differences of sex are physical alone,"<sup>43</sup> and to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., IV, chapter VIII. For a good summary of women martyrs in the early church cf. Zscharnack, op. cit., pp. 27-37.

<sup>40</sup> Paedagogus, II, chapter II.

<sup>41</sup> Stromata, IV, chapter VIII.

<sup>42</sup> Paedagogus, I, chapter IV.

<sup>43</sup> Tollinton, op. cit., I, 286-87.

comment that:

Perhaps, like his master Plato, Clement somewhat underrates the differences, and fails to see that the two natures have each something distinctive to contribute to human well-being. But, this apart, it is sufficiently evident that his standard and ideal for women is a high one.<sup>44</sup>

This certainly seems to be Clement's chief distinction; i.e., in the realm of the physical is to be seen the chief difference between male and female while in the realm of the spirit they are equal. This difference is one of nature and issues in different functions. Clement's own statement summarizes it well:

As then there is sameness, as far as respects the soul, she will attain to the same virtue; but as there is difference as respects the peculiar construction of the body, she is destined for child-bearing and housekeeping.<sup>45</sup>

Thus the status of women because they are females is different from that of men, and one would infer from Clement's reference to them when speaking of the shame of drunkenness that he thought also that the female sex was inferior.

The status of women as seen in the marriage relationship. Most of what Clement has to say about women falls under this second classification. This would be expected from the nature of the errors he had to combat, as explained in the previous section.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., I, 287.

<sup>45</sup> Stromata, IV, chapter VIII.

At times in his writings Clement seems to give a decided preference to celibacy. He clearly says that his own opinion on the subject is:

We esteem chastity blessed, as well as those on whom this gift is conferred by God; we admire a single marriage, and the decorous gravity attached to it; saying, however, that we ought to sympathize with each other, and 'bear each other's burdens, lest he who thinks he stands should himself fall.' With respect to a second marriage, I say with the Apostle, let him who burns, marry.<sup>46</sup>

He further adds:

For the use and enjoyment of necessities are not injurious in quality, but in quantity, when in excess. Wherefore the Gnostic circumscribes his desires in reference both to possession and to enjoyment, not exceeding the limit of necessity. Therefore, regarding life in this world as necessary for the increase of science and the acquisition of knowledge, he will value highest, not living, but living well. He will therefore prefer neither children, nor marriage, nor parents, to love for God, and righteousness in life. To such an one, his wife, after conception, is as a sister, and is judged as if of the same father; than only recollecting her husband, when she looks on the children; as being destined to become a sister in reality after putting off the flesh, which separates and limits the knowledge of those who are spiritual by the peculiar characteristics of the sexes. For souls, themselves by themselves, are equal. Souls are neither male nor female, when they no longer marry nor are given in marriage.<sup>47</sup>

On the other hand, he is just as emphatic in insisting that marriage is in perfect accord with Christian perfection.

Wherefore also he eats, and drinks, and marries, not as principal ends of existence, but as necessary. I name marriage even, if the Word prescribe, and as is suitable. For having become perfect, he has the apostles for examples; and one is not really shown to be a man in the choice of single life; but he surpasses men, who

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., III, chapter I.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., VI, chapter XII.

disciplined by marriage, procreation of children, and care for the house, without pleasure or pain, in his solicitude for the house has been inseparable from God's love, and withstood all temptation arising through children, and wife, and domestics, and possessions. But he that has no family is in a great degree free of temptation. Caring then for himself alone, he is surpassed by him who is inferior, as far as his own personal salvation is concerned, but who is superior in the conduct of life, preserving certainly, in his care for the truth, a minute image.<sup>48</sup>

In answer to the question why was Christ not married, Clement says:

Christ had His own bride, the Church; then He was not a common man, and consequently wanted no helpmate in the flesh; nor was it necessary for Him to beget children, as He remains for ever, and is the only Son of God.<sup>49</sup>

The solution to this inconsistency in Clement's language concerning marriage seems to be that he "deemed the performance of any act, by which the senses are gratified, for the purpose of obtaining that gratification, derogatory from Christian perfection--nay, even sinful."<sup>50</sup> No woman, then, in the Christian relationship, may be used merely for the gratification of the senses. Indeed, as has been shown above, Clement seems not only to disallow any such lustful designs on women, but he elevates her to a place of equality with her husband ("a sister in reality") after she has borne him children. He does not do this on the basis of any resurrection ethic applying in the present, but rather

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., VII, chapter XII.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., III, chapter VI.

<sup>50</sup> John Kaye, Some Account of the Writings and Opinions of Clement of Alexandria (London: Griffith Farren Okeden & Welsh, n. d.), p. 271. Cf. Paedagogus, II, chpt. X, "ψιλή γὰρ ἡδονὴ, κἂν ἐν γάμῳ παραληφθῇ, παράνομός ἐστι, καὶ ἄδικος, καὶ ἄλογος."



on the basis of his idea of equality of souls though not of sexes.<sup>51</sup> It is important to keep in mind this basically lofty conception of a woman's relation to her husband in Clement's conception of Christian marriage as we consider next certain details of that relationship.

As has been intimated, Clement places a high priority on the procreation of children as the lawful use of marriage. Intercourse should only take place between a man and his own wife and only with a view to the procreation of children.<sup>52</sup> The law also "regards it not right that intercourse should take place either in wantonness or for hire like harlots, but only for the birth of children."<sup>53</sup> Again he says:

Marriage is the first conjunction of man and woman for the procreation of legitimate children. . . . Nature has adapted us for marriage, as is evident from the structure of our bodies, which are male and female. And they constantly proclaim that command, "Increase and replenish." . . . Therefore we must by all means marry, both for our country's sake, for the succession of children, and as far as we are concerned, for the perfection of the world. . . . Now marriage is a help in the case of those advanced in years, by furnishing a spouse to take care of one, and by rearing children of her to nourish one's old age. . . . It is unmanly and weak to shun living with a wife and children. . . . But the loss of children is, they say, among the chiefest evils; the possession of children is, consequently a good thing; and if it be so, so also is marriage.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Stromata, III, chapter VI. "If they have received the resurrection and they say also on account of this they abstain from marriage, neither let them eat nor drink."

<sup>52</sup> Paedagogus, II, chapter X.

<sup>53</sup> Stromata, II, chapter XVIII.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., II, chapter XXIII.



Using Matthew 18:20 in a unique way, he says, "'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' The three are the man, the woman, and their child . . . ."55 The complete family, in other words, includes children.

In addition, Clement is quite definite about a woman's place and duty within the family. In these matters there is definite subordination of the woman's status as well as the conception that the household is her world. In the light of what has already been shown to be his idea concerning a woman's position, one would say that these ideas of subordination yet honor within the household are more similar to Jewish practice than Greek or Roman. Clement says:

For with perfect propriety Scripture has said that woman is given by God as "an help" to man. It is evident, then, in my opinion, that she will charge herself with remedying, by good sense and persuasion, each of the annoyances that originate with her husband in domestic economy. And if he do not yield, then she will endeavour, as far as possible for human nature, to lead a sinless life.<sup>56</sup>

The wise woman, then, will first choose to persuade her husband to be her associate in what is conducive to happiness. And should that be found impracticable, let her by herself earnestly aim at virtue, gaining her husband's consent in everything, so as never to do anything against his will, with exception of what is reckoned as contributing to virtue and salvation.<sup>57</sup>

Nor are women to be deprived of bodily exercise. But they are not to be encouraged to engage in wrestling or running, but are to exercise themselves in spinning, and weaving, and superintending the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., III, chapter X.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., IV, chapter XX.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., IV, chapter XIX.

cooking if necessary. And they are, with their own hand, to fetch from the store, what we require. And it is no disgrace for them to apply themselves to the mill. Nor is it a reproach to a wife--housekeeper and helpmeet--to occupy herself in cooking, so that it may be palatable to her husband. And if she shake up the couch, reach drink to her husband when thirsty, set food on the table as neatly as possible, and so give herself exercise tending to sound health, the Instructor will approve of a woman like this.<sup>58</sup>

Wherefore also women ought to dress neatly, and bind themselves around with the band of chaste modesty, lest through giddiness they slip away from the truth. It is right, then, for men to repose confidence in their wives, and commit the charge of the household to them as they are given to be their helpers in this. . . . For the labour of their own hands, above all, adds genuine beauty to women, exercising their bodies and adorning themselves by their own exertions . . . . For a most beautiful thing is a thrifty wife, who clothes both herself and her husband with fair array of her own working . . . .<sup>59</sup>

She who emulates Sarah is not ashamed of that highest of ministries, helping wayfarers.<sup>60</sup>

Clement would evidently have subscribed to the maxim that a woman's work is never done, for he says (in all seriousness):

For those who have the sleepless Word dwelling in them ought not to sleep the livelong night, but they ought to rise by night . . . and one devote himself to literature, another being his art, the women handle the distaff, and all of us should, so to speak, fight against sleep.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Paedagogus, III, chapter X.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., III, chapter XI.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., III, chapter X.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., II, chapter IX.

However, in all of this service "the chaste wife, when she devotes herself to her husband, sincerely serves God."<sup>62</sup>

It is important to note further that in all these matters related to marriage, its suitability and the subordination of the wife to the husband, Clement insists that his teaching follows that of the Apostles.

All the Epistles of the Apostle, while they inculcate chastity and continence, and contain various precepts respecting marriage, the procreation of children, the management of household, nowhere condemn a chaste marriage; but preserving the consistency between the law and the gospel, approve both him who lives in the married state chastely and with thankfulness to God, and him who lives a life of celibacy as the Lord wills; each choosing to remain as he is called, without offence or imperfection.<sup>63</sup>

They say, accordingly, that the blessed Peter, on seeing his wife led to death, rejoiced on account of her call and conveyance home, and called very encouragingly and comfortingly, addressing her by name, "Remember thou the Lord." Such was the marriage of the blessed, and their perfect disposition towards those dearest to them.

Thus also the apostle says, "That he who marries should be as though he married not," and deem his marriage free of inordinate affection, and inseparable from love to the Lord; to which the true husband exhorted his wife to cling on her departure out of this life to the Lord.<sup>64</sup>

The ruling power is therefore the head. And if "the Lord is head of the man, and the man is head of the woman," the man, "being the image and glory of God, is lord of the woman." Wherefore also in

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., II, chapter XI.

<sup>63</sup> Stromata, III, chapter XII.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., VII, chapter XI.

the Epistle to the Ephesians it is written . . . "[he then quotes Eph. 5:21-29 and Col. 3:18-25]."<sup>65</sup>

These ideas seem not to be unrelated to an implied solidarity of the human race. This may be related to a vague idea which seems evident in Clement's writings that he considered the race to have a certain solidarity with Adam, especially as seen in his idea of the fall. There is no positive suggestion of original guilt though there is "at least the minimal doctrine of 'Original Sin.'"<sup>66</sup>

One could do no better than quote Tollinton's words to summarize Clement's teaching concerning the status of women as seen in what he has to say concerning the marriage relationship:

While the Alexandrine father is very exacting towards Christian womanhood and would place it beyond reach of every charge of immodesty, extravagance, vulgarity, and display, he has also claimed for it a full and honourable share in those high spiritual interests, which were to him of supreme account. . . . In Clement Christianity sanctions all the best that had previously been claimed for womanhood, and lays special stress on those qualities of purity and domestic love which are so intimately connected with its message and ideals.<sup>67</sup>

Status of women in church relationships. Clement has very little to say that throws light on any official or unofficial status women may have had in the life of the organized church. Women's service for Christ was primarily in the domestic sphere. There is no indication of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., IV, chapter VIII.

<sup>66</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 203. Cf. To the Greeks, XI.

<sup>67</sup> Tollinton, op. cit., I, 288.

an order of widows though silence does not necessarily indicate non-existence. References to widows are in relation to second marriages; e.g., "some deemed the virtue of a widow, who did not contract a second marriage, superior to that of a virgin."<sup>68</sup> Women are instructed to be veiled when they go to church "since it is becoming for her to pray veiled."<sup>69</sup> If she took any other active part in public worship apart from praying Clement does not mention it.

There is, however, one outstanding reference about ministering women. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:5 were understood to refer not to wives of the apostles but to ministering women who accompanied them in their own ministry,<sup>70</sup> for Clement refers to these ministering women (διακονων γυναικων), whom as fellow-ministers (συνδίακονοι) the Apostles took with them "not as wives, but as sisters"<sup>71</sup> in order that they might give themselves without distraction to the ministry of the Word. But Clement does not say or even allude to the fact that this was done by women in his own day or that there was anything that might be called an order of deaconesses.

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<sup>68</sup> Stromata, III, chapter VI.

<sup>69</sup> Paedagogus, III, chapter XI.

<sup>70</sup> "μη οὐκ ἔχομεν ἐξουσίαν ἀδελφὴν γυναῖκα περιάγειν, ὡς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ ἀπόστολοι . . ."

<sup>71</sup> Stromata, III, chapter VI.

Aside from these few references there are no others which are relevant to this aspect of the subject. One might conclude from Clement's silence that women had assumed no other role or functions than those given to them in the New Testament, though even such a statement might be open to question.

### III. SUMMARY

In the realm of the spirit and as far as spiritual responsibilities are concerned there is no difference between male and female. Women's special status is related to her physical nature. Clement seemed to feel that this was an inferior position to that of man's; it certainly involved different responsibilities. These are especially evident in the sphere of married life where the woman's world, at least during the period of rearing her children, is her domestic life. After the period of procreation, which is the purpose of marriage, there is a somewhat different relationship of more spiritual equality between the husband and wife, though Clement reasserts the Pauline principle of the headship of the husband. Elements of subordination and elevation are both present.

Women are protected from all immorality and immodesty in this Christian ethic of Clement. The very fact that Clement deals with these matters in such detail in guiding the Christian woman in the conduct of her faith bespeaks a more exacting moral standard than existed in heathen society of his day. Even in the domestic duties assigned to

women there is nothing of the ancient Greek idea of confinement but more of the Jewish conception that the home with its duties and responsibilities under the headship of the husband is the place of honor for the woman. If one's idea of the advance of women must exclude the idea of "helpmeet" with its concept of subordination, then one will find in Clement reversion to this narrower concept. But one thing is certain--Clement himself did not consider this retrogression, for all of these principles are part of true Gnosticism, and one could have no higher status than that of a true Gnostic.

Unfortunately, we shall have to be content with Clement's relative silence concerning the work of women in the organized church. It has been shown that he considers that her private life properly conducted in the home is a service unto God, but one can only wish that more had been stated concerning her public ministry in the church. One can only suggest that evidently there had been little change from the ministry of women in New Testament days.

#### IV. CLEMENT'S SUCCESSOR

Succeeding Clement in the headship of the Catechetical school was Origen whom Cruttwell calls "the most interesting, the most learned, and in some respects the greatest of patristic writers."<sup>72</sup> Born A. D. 185 at Alexandria, the son of Christian parents, he listened

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<sup>72</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., II, 462.



in his youth to both Pantaenus and Clement, growing the meanwhile in the knowledge of the Scriptures and untouched by the stain of the world. His father was martyred when Origen was only seventeen thus forcing the boy to take up teaching as a means of livelihood. When he was only eighteen he was made head of the Catechetical school. During the next twelve years his life was spent in extreme self-denial, increasing wisdom, and brilliant teaching. It is during this period that Origen performed the act of self-mutiliation of which Eusebius speaks<sup>73</sup> on the basis of a very literal interpretation of Matthew 19:12 and his desire to avoid any possible scandal in his converse with women. The rest of his life after A. D. 215 is marked by visits to Caesarea, prodigious writing, persecution by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities, and finally death at Tyre in 253.

Though his writings were numerous,<sup>74</sup> "what is lost was far more than what is preserved."<sup>75</sup> We do have large portions of his commentaries on Matthew, John, and Romans; detached readings from the Hexapla; various Homilies; his important doctrinal treatise on First Principles; and the Books against Celsus. Two things relevant to this thesis surprise us in his extant works. One is the relatively small amount of

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<sup>73</sup> Ecclesiastical History, Book VI, chapter 8.

<sup>74</sup> For a complete list see B. F. Westcott, "Origines," Dictionary of Christian Biography, IV, pp. 103-4.

<sup>75</sup> Fenton John Anthony Hort, Six Lectures on the Ante-Nicene Fathers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1895), p. 127.

pertinent material that can be gleaned from his writings concerning his own or the church's opinion of the status of women. The second is the apparent absence in Origen's thought of any connection between what he does say about the place of women and his doctrine of the fall of man. Though he did postulate a sinfulness inherent in birth and in his later years conceived that this "stain derived from the processes of conception and birth [was] . . . purely physical,"<sup>76</sup> and that in this process the woman becomes unclean, he does not assign her an inferior position because of all that may have been involved in the fall or in any other way link it with her position.

Nevertheless, even though Origen does not link it with the fall, he does assign the superior position to the male sex. In commenting on Matthew 19:3 he remarks:

For at no time is it "woman" or "man" "after the image," but the superior class, the male, and the second, the female. . . . Then, describing what ought to be in the case of those who are joined together by God, so that they may be joined together in a manner worthy of God, the Saviour adds, "so that they are no more twain;" and, wherever there is indeed concord, and unison, and harmony, between husband and wife, when he is as ruler and she is obedient to the word, "He shall rule over thee," then of such persons we may truly say, "They are no more twain."<sup>77</sup>

One might wish that he had elaborated on this lordship of a husband over his wife.

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<sup>76</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 225. Cf. his entire discussion, pp. 210-231.

<sup>77</sup> Commentary on Matthew, XIV, 16.

Clearer, however, is the more meritorious position Origen assigns to the life of virginity and celibacy in contrast to the married state. It is well summarized in a remark directed to Celsus:

But God has allowed us to marry, because all are not fit for the higher, that is, the perfectly pure life; and God would have us to bring up all our children, and not to destroy any of the offspring given us by His providence.<sup>78</sup>

Though marriage is Divinely ordained, it seems to take a secondary place to the celibate life. In another place Origen speaks of certain Christians "who maintain a perpetual virginity"<sup>79</sup> and who do so because of "a wish to worship God with greater purity" who consequently "abstain even from the permitted indulgences of [lawful] love."<sup>80</sup> Such chastity he declares is a gift from God "given . . . with prayer," and from the many quotations of verses concerning prayer promises which follow this declaration, it seems not unlikely that he thought Christians would not do wrong to pray for the gift of chastity.<sup>81</sup>

One reference in his writings is related to the question of the official status of women in the life of the church. In his commentary on Romans 16:1-2, Origen says only that: ". . . this passage (Rom. xvi. 1, 2) shows that women also were set in the ministry of the Church; in which office Phoebe was placed in the Church which is in

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<sup>78</sup> Against Celsus, VIII, chapter LV.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., VII, chapter XLVIII.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., I, chapter XXVI.

<sup>81</sup> Commentary on Matthew, XIV, 25.

Cenchreae."<sup>82</sup> Though it might be argued that he believed that Phoebe was a deaconess in an official sense, it would not be so easily proved that there was anything approaching an order of deaconesses in Origen's time. In this silence the writings of Origen are like those of his predecessor, Clement. In the meritorious place assigned to celibacy they are unlike Clement's, and this is the major relevant contribution of Clement's successor.

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<sup>82</sup> Commentary on Romans, X, 17.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE AFRICAN FATHERS

From the consideration of the Alexandrian writers attention is turned to the writers of a region geographically not remote from Egypt (though theologically so), the Roman proconsular province of Africa, generally called North Africa. Nothing is known about the founding or of the earlier history of the churches in this region although:

. . . there is good reason to believe that they first created a Latin Bible. They also probably contributed largely to the creation of the church organisation which became prevalent in the West. They certainly created the distinctively Latin theology, which, developed especially by Augustine, and again by great theologians of the Middle Ages, and again by the leading Continental Reformers of the sixteenth century, has dominated men's thoughts in Western Europe respecting God and man, both for good and for evil.<sup>1</sup>

The first two great Fathers known to us from the North African Churches come under consideration in this chapter, Tertullian and Cyprian.

#### I. TERTULLIAN'S LIFE

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was born about 160, a native of Carthage. By this time Carthage was once again a wealthy, enterprising, and ambitious city standing in the front-rank of famous cities of the world but not yet having produced a man of first-rank. The Christian church there was flourishing though she looked to Rome for her rule of orthodoxy. She was constantly tempted and occasionally compromised with the luxuries of the world and attempted to make her

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<sup>1</sup> Hort, The Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 94.

Christianity fashionable. "Into this community, with its luxurious religionism, its latent earnestness, and its serene self-satisfaction, the personality of Tertullian must have fallen like a thunderbolt."<sup>2</sup>

Tertullian evidently took fullest advantage of the culture and pleasures of his environment. He was trained as an advocate in the course of which training he spent some time in Rome and Athens. His conversion may be placed between 192 and 195, and according to his own testimony it was a conversion from heathenism and the usual heathen sins. The martyrdoms of Christians apparently had some effect on his own conversion. He was married and admitted to the priesthood. In approximately 201 Tertullian left the church and embraced the tenets of Montanism, and a number of his extant works were written after this. His life was continued through the reign of Elagabalus (218-222) and into the reign of Severus (222-235). There is no reason to believe he was martyred, and his death may be placed about 230.

With such a background it is not surprising to discover that this Father's writings are cast in a rhetorical and argumentative style. There is no lack of weight of learning though there is lack of width of view and patient moderation. He has little of Clement's reverence for the truth as the mystery of God which can only be known in part. Tertullian's reasoning is that of an advocate; Clement's, that

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<sup>2</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., II, 549.

of a philosopher. His style has been described in this way:

Irony and sarcasm and paradox and downright special pleading alternate with grand bursts of eloquence and long stretches of solid reasoning. His stern uncompromising sentences come like blows of a hammer crushing everything before them: for mercy is a word he understood no better than the Stoics. He was a Montanist in temper long before he accepted the oracles of the New Prophecy.<sup>3</sup>

The style is the man.

Nevertheless, one cannot but respect the man, for he above all others is painfully aware of his own shortcomings.<sup>4</sup> In his conversion he cast aside all his heathen past so that there is not one false ring in his writings. Beliefs were to him no barren dogmas or matters for mere discussion; hence his works are permeated with intense personal fervor. "And this eloquence never slips away from the control of revealed truth. It oversteps the limits of moral wisdom, of good taste, of decency, but of Catholic tradition never."<sup>5</sup> "He was a rigorist from the first, and a prince among rigorists."<sup>6</sup> It was no wonder that Montanism had attractions for him.

## II. MONTANISM

Because Montanism was an important influence in the life and writings of Tertullian, we cannot proceed further without first

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<sup>3</sup> Gwatkin, op. cit., II, 239.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Of Patience, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., II, 554.

<sup>6</sup> Gwatkin, op. cit., II, 239.



considering the sect and its teaching. Gnosticism and Montanism were the two chief deviations from catholic teaching during the second century. In matters related to the status of women it was Clement of Alexandria who wrote against the false teaching being put forward concerning marriage by the Gnostics. If, in this thesis, Gnosticism may be said to be related to Clement, Montanism is related to Tertullian. If the Gnostics leaned to the intellectual side of Christianity, the Montanists did likewise to what might be called the inspirational side. Unlike the Gnostics, the Montanists did not for the most part depart from the apostolic foundation of the church. It is rightly said that "Montanism . . . is unique . . . in being a purely internal controversy. In all the others, even in Gnosticism, the Church was faced with something external to herself."<sup>7</sup>

To understand fully this deviation, it will be necessary to trace some of its antecedents. In apostolic days the prophet was a recognized figure in church life. What was spoken by the Holy Spirit through him was considered binding (cf. Acts 11:27-30), and the prophet is placed second only to the apostle in the Pauline lists of divinely bestowed ministers in the church.<sup>8</sup> According to the Didaché, at the end of the first century the prophet still occupied a place of honor though tests were laid down for determining a true prophet. A local

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<sup>7</sup> W. D. Niven, "Montanism," The Expository Times (Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, Dec. 1927), p. 102.

<sup>8</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11.

church was to consider itself honored highly if a true prophet settled among the group. It is not difficult to see how tension would exist between the authority of the leaders of the local church and that of prophets, especially those who were not attached to one church. The Didaché, in fact, does try to maintain a balance between these two potentially conflicting authorities. Ignatius shortly thereafter, in laying stress on the supremacy of the single bishop, practically excluded the exercise of prophecy. The Shepherd of Hermas, on the other hand, is an example of prophecy, which may account for the great popularity of the work. "There is, in fact, an inevitable tension between the ordered forms of regular ministry and the more unpredictable and enthusiastic forms. It frequently happens that those who appreciate one form cannot abide the other."<sup>9</sup> It is plain to see how such tension could develop easily into a schism which is exactly what did happen in Montanism, the chief manifestation of prophetism in the post-apostolic age.

It was in the uplands of Phrygia that this new religious activity appeared about 156 A. D. Asia Minor had a predisposition to enthusiastic religion especially in the cult of Cybele, the Great Mother of the Gods, which may have helped to foster and nurture Montanism. Montanus, the leader of this system "was in no sense a great man; but, like all enthusiasts, he had the faculty of attracting minds superior

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<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, The Growing Day (London: The Paternoster Press, 1951), p. 85.

to his own."<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is quite true that "the sect would have made but a small ripple on the surface of Christendom, if the wayward genius of Tertullian had not lent energy to its propaganda."<sup>11</sup> Very little is known about the life of Montanus himself; actually,

All that can be deemed historically certain . . . is that this personage began a religious movement, the full bearing of which he may not have conceived himself, but in which his share is undeniable.<sup>12</sup>

His teaching, however, is well known. He taught that, just as the dispensation of the Father had given place to the dispensation of the Son at the Incarnation, so the dispensation of the Son had now given place to the dispensation of the Spirit. Christ's promise of the coming of the Paraclete had been fulfilled now and Montanus was the Paraclete's mouthpiece. All of this was the prelude to the second advent of Christ who would establish the New Jerusalem in Phrygia. Hort summarizes the characteristics of the movement well:

Briefly, its characteristics were these; first, a strong faith in the Holy Spirit as the promised Paraclete, present as a heavenly power in the Church of the day; secondly, specially a belief that the Holy Spirit was manifesting Himself supernaturally at that day through entranced prophets and prophetesses; and thirdly, an inculcation of a specially stern and exacting standard of Christian morality and discipline on the strength of certain teachings of these prophets. An increase in the numbers and prosperity of the Church having brought an increase of laxity, it was not unnatural that

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<sup>10</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., II, 555.

<sup>11</sup> R. A. Knox, Enthusiasm (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 25.

<sup>12</sup> John De Soyres, Montanism and the Primitive Church (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1878), p. 33.

attempts should be made to stem it by a rigorous system of prohibitions. To these three characteristics of Montanism may be added two others, fourthly, a tendency to set up prophets against bishops, the new episcopal organisation being probably favourable to that large inclusiveness of Christian communion in which the Montanists saw only spiritual danger; and fifthly, an eager anticipation of the Lord's Second Coming as near at hand, and a consequent indifference to ordinary human affairs.<sup>13</sup>

Two of Montanus' immediate followers, and the most notable, were two women, Priscilla and Maximilla. They are not only mentioned as companions of their leader but also as sharers in the gift of prophecy.<sup>14</sup> These two women, who had been married, "left their husbands, were given by Montanus the rank of virgins in the church, and were widely revered as prophetesses."<sup>15</sup> Priscilla had supposedly seen Christ come to her in a vision in the form of a woman in a bright garment who inspired her with wisdom and informed her that Pepuza was the holy place where the New Jerusalem was to descend from heaven. Maximilla taught that she herself was to be the last prophetess in the church and that after her death the end would come. The Phrygian bishops thought these people were demon-possessed and attempted to exorcise them, but the condemnation in Phrygia caused the influence of the teaching to spread to Rome and eventually to North Africa.

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<sup>13</sup> Hort, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

<sup>14</sup> Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, IV, 27 and V, 16-18.

<sup>15</sup> George Salmon, "Montanus," A Dictionary of Christian Biography (London: John Murray, 1882), III, 936.

The vital tenet of Montanism which appealed to Tertullian was the insistence on a high standard of conduct for Christians. Since the world is doomed and since the end is near, Christians should in a very literal sense leave the world by living more and more austere and holy lives. Fasts should be multiplied; no one should marry twice; and virginity was especially honored. Though Tertullian speaks of the blessing of marriage, as will be shown, nevertheless the ascetic view is never very far away, and many of his arguments against a second marriage are just as valid against marriage at all. But, it has rightly been maintained that:

Not by its charismatic ministry, not by its Phrygian Adventism, but by its puritanism did Montanism win adherents far and wide, awake sympathy in distant Gaul, enlist in its service the great Tertullian, and bring a Bishop of Rome to the point of almost blessing it.<sup>16</sup>

Tertullian's nature was stern and uncompromising. When he broke with heathenism, he broke completely. It would not seem absurd to him that the Holy Spirit could speak through instruments like Montanus, Priscilla, and Maximilla. (What he specifically says will be introduced later.) He would readily welcome any movement that might purify conditions in the church and would enforce its strict standards with all his powers. Add this to the state of Carthaginian Christianity in his day, and the result can only be Tertullian's acceptance of

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<sup>16</sup> Niven, op. cit., p. 104.

Montanism. That state of the church is well summarized in these words:

The standard of holiness had sunk very low. Worldliness was rampant among those who should have set an example of self-denial. The effeminate luxury of the priesthood excited his [Tertullian's] daily scorn: the love of dress had made the very Virgins of the Church vie with their heathen sisters in each art that could captivate the eye of man. Even the veil, that immemorial badge of maiden modesty, was discarded. Christian men and women frequented the public shows, those vile nurseries of profligacy and cruelty. It seemed as if the Church had striven to quench the Spirit, and the Spirit, affronted, had deserted the Church.<sup>17</sup>

Small wonder that such a movement in such a surrounding would appeal to such a man.

### III. TERTULLIAN'S VIEWS ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

Tertullian has a great deal to say about and to women. Indeed, some of his works are either addressed to women (e.g., the letters addressed to his wife and the tract on the dress of women) or concern their responsibilities and relationships (e.g., De Virginibus Velandis, De Monogamia). With so much material directly bearing on the subject it is rather surprising to discover that "in regard to the general position of women in Christian thought and society, there is little that is distinctive of the period we are now studying."<sup>18</sup> Though this is true in general, there are to be found certain distinctive trends as well as certain deviations from catholic practice during this period.

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<sup>17</sup> Cruttwell, op. cit., II, 557.

<sup>18</sup> Cadoux, op. cit., p. 443.

Relation of the sexes. In comparing Clement of Alexandria with Tertullian, Cadoux declares that: "Broadly speaking, Clemens is its feminist, and Tertullianus its woman-hater."<sup>19</sup> There is no doubt that this is speaking broadly, for it has been shown that Clement, although insisting on equality of male and female in many points, nevertheless recognizes a fundamental distinction over which the caption superior-inferior might be placed. Whether Tertullian can be called a woman-hater will become clear as the evidence is presented. There is no doubt that he is very hard on the female sex in holding its members responsible for all the consequences of Eve's sin and making this the basis for his exhortation to women to dress simply and modestly. His words are:

If there dwelt upon earth a faith as great as is the reward of faith which is expected in the heavens, no one of you at all, best beloved sisters, from the time that she had first "known the Lord," and learned concerning her own (that is, woman's) condition, would have desired too gladsome (not to say too ostentatious) a style of dress; so as not rather to go about in humble garb, and rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that be every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve,—the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and the odium [attaching to her as the cause] of human perdition. "In pains and in anxieties dost thou bear, woman; and toward thine husband thy inclination, and he lords it over thee." And do you not know that you are [each] an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of that tree: you are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image,

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<sup>19</sup> Cadoux, loc. cit.



man. On account of your desert--that is, death--even the Son of God had to die.<sup>20</sup>

In dealing with the question of the veiling of virgins, Tertullian argues from the greater to the lesser, stating that if certain liberties had not been allowed to male virgins (eunuchs) they certainly are not allowed to female virgins. "But if nothing [ has been thus conceded ] to the male, much more to the female."<sup>21</sup> In the same chapter he says that females are "subjected . . . throughout to men."

At once it is clear that Tertullian not only considers the female sex to be in a secondary position to the male, but also that he connects this inferior position of women with the story of the fall of man in Eden. Though more clearly defined than those of the other fathers considered, Tertullian's ideas of anthropology still leave much to be desired. It is true, however, of African theology in general that it maintains "a sterner and gloomier presentation of the ideas of the Fall and of Original Sin."<sup>22</sup> The beginnings of these ideas are evident in the writings of Tertullian. For example, in one place Tertullian declares quite clearly that:

every soul is enumerated as being 'in Adam,' until that moment when it is re-enumerated as being 'in Christ;' and it is unclean until it is so re-enumerated. But the soul is a sinner, because it is

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<sup>20</sup> De Cultu Feminarum, I, 1.

<sup>21</sup> De Virginibus Velandis, 10.

<sup>22</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 231.

[in itself] unclean, not because it derives its disgrace from its alliance with the flesh.<sup>23</sup>

That the whole race is justly culpable for having fallen "in Adam" is suggested by the following:

. . . [Satan] by whom man was deceived in the beginning, that he should overstep the commandment of God; wherefore man was given over to death, and has made his whole race, drawing contamination from his seed, a stock or breed stained with his own condemnation.<sup>24</sup>

This same thought is evident in the passage first quoted in this section (De Cultu Feminarum) where the female part of the race, at least, is viewed as a unity and held responsible for the first sin of Eve.

Williams summarizes Tertullian's doctrine of the fall in the following manner:

(1) that he taught no explicit doctrine of 'Original Guilt'; (2) that, however, he held a much more severe doctrine of 'Original Sin' than any which we have hitherto come across, regarding the hereditary consequences of Adam's fall as a positive corruption, not a mere weakness, a depravatio rather than a deprivatio; and (3) that he shows at least a strong tendency to view this corruption juridically or forensically, as though it were a crime, rather than medically, as would be natural if it were a mere infirmity.<sup>25</sup>

To these, he might have added a fourth; i.e., that Tertullian related woman's subjugation to the man to her part in original sin. This is clear from the contextual setting of the words already cited "and he

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<sup>23</sup> De Anima, 40.

<sup>24</sup> De Testimonio Animae, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Williams, op. cit., p. 241.

lords it over thee."

Marriage and virginity. The tendency to prefer celibacy over marriage which we have noticed developing in Catholic circles continues in full force in the writings of Tertullian. Marriage was certainly permitted and was "regarded as a very good and providentially ordained second-best,"<sup>26</sup> but the virgin life was considered more meritorious. The contrast between heathen ways and Christian practices which was so oft-repeated in Clement appears in Tertullian but not to the same extent. In his Apology he charges the heathen with illicit intercourse, incest, exposure of children, and lustful indulgence in general. Of the Christian, by contrast, he says:

A persevering and stedfast chastity has protected us from anything like this: keeping as we do from adulteries and all post-matrimonial unfaithfulness, we are not exposed to incestuous mishaps. Some of us, making matters still more secure, beat away from them entirely the power of sensual sin, by a virgin continence, still boys in this respect when they are old. If you would but take notice that such sins as I have mentioned prevail among you, that would lead you to see that they have no existence among Christians.<sup>27</sup>

In these matters Christianity did bring higher standards and consequent protection and higher status for its women.

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<sup>26</sup> Cadoux, op. cit., p. 444.

<sup>27</sup> Apology, 9.

However, this idea of the meritoriousness of celibacy prevails.

To his wife, Tertullian, while still in the Catholic church,<sup>28</sup> wrote:

. . . there is no place at all where we read that nuptials are prohibited; of course on the ground that they are "a good thing." What, however, is better than this "good," we learn from the apostle, who permits marrying indeed, but prefers abstinence; the former on account of the insidiousnesses of temptations, the latter on account of the straits of the times. Now, by looking into the reason thus given for each proposition, it is easily discerned that the ground on which the power of marrying is conceded is necessity; but whatever necessity grants, she by her very nature depreciates. . . . Why, even in persecution it is better to take advantage of the permission granted, and "flee from town to town," than, when apprehended and racked, to deny [the faith]. And therefore more blessed are they who have strength to depart [this life] in blessed confession of their testimony. I may say, What is permitted is not good. . . . A thing is not "good" merely because it is not "evil," nor is it "evil" merely because it is not "harmful." . . . But he [Paul] nowhere permits marriage in such a way as not rather to wish us to do our utmost in imitation of his own example. Happy the man who shall prove like Paul!<sup>29</sup>

It scarcely needs to be pointed out that Tertullian considered himself to be following the Apostolic teaching in this regard. And yet, in spite of the merit attached to the celibate life, Christian marriage was ~~not~~ esteemed in his mind, for he declares:

Whence are we to find [words] enough fully to tell the happiness of that marriage which the Church cements, and the oblation confirms, and the benediction signs and seals; [which] angels carry back the news of [to heaven], [which] the Father holds for ratified? . . . Both brethren, both fellow-servants, no difference of spirit or of flesh: nay, truly "two in one flesh." . . . Together

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<sup>28</sup> Neander's and Kaye's classifications of pre-Montanist and post-Montanist writings are conveniently set side by side in Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Writings of Tertullian), III, xii-xiii.

<sup>29</sup> Ad Uxorem, I, 3.

they pray, together prostrate themselves, together perform their fasts; mutually teaching, mutually exhorting, mutually sustaining.<sup>30</sup>

Embracing Montanism made no change in Tertullian's ideas concerning the legitimacy of marriage but the preference for celibacy. In commenting to Marcion on 1 Thessalonians 4, he says:

That we should "abstain from fornication," not from marriage. . . . The law of nature . . . takes care of our vessel by the honourable estate of matrimony. This passage I would treat in such a way as to maintain the superiority of the other and higher sanctity, preferring continence and virginity to marriage, but by no means prohibiting the latter.<sup>31</sup>

"Good," he says, "for a man not to have contact with a woman." It follows that it is evil to have contact with her; for nothing is contrary to good except evil. . . . his volition points another way. "I will," he says, "that you all so be as I too." . . . Therefore, of all these [considerations] obliterate the licence of marrying, whether we look into the condition on which the licence is granted, or the preference of continence which is imposed, why after the apostles, could not the same Spirit, supervening for the purpose of conducting discipleship into "all truth" through the gradations of the times . . . impose by this time a final bridle upon the flesh, no longer obliquely calling us away from marriage, but openly; since now more "the time is become wound up,"--about 160 years having elapsed since then?<sup>32</sup>

In this latter passage Tertullian has introduced the eschatological motive evident in the Pauline writings for preferring continence. He elaborates:

For why did the Lord foretell a "woe to them that are with child, and them that give suck," except because He testifies that in that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., II, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Adversus Marcion, V, 15.

<sup>32</sup> De Monogamia, 3.

day of disencumbrance the encumbrances of children will be an inconvenience? It is to marriage, of course, that those encumbrances appertain; but that will not pertain to widows. At the first trump of the angel they will spring forth disencumbered--will freely bear to the end whatsoever pressure and persecution, with no burdensome fruit of marriage heaving in the womb, none in the bosom.<sup>33</sup>

. . . the "woe" "on such as are with child and are giving suck," will fall far more heavily and bitterly in the "universal shaking" of the entire world than it did in the devastation of one fraction of Judea. Let them accumulate by their iterated marriages fruits right seasonable for the last times--breasts heaving, and wombs qualmish, and infants whimpering. Let them prepare for Antichrist [children] upon whom he may more passionately spend his savagery.<sup>34</sup>

It should be noted that this argument concerning the near approach of the end as a reason for celibacy is used with reference to second marriages. Nevertheless, like so much of what he says against second marriages, this argument might be applied with equal force against marriage at all. However, we must conclude that Tertullian, though giving definite preference to celibacy, was an ardent advocate of monogamous marriage against both successive and simultaneous polygamy. "He thought to occupy the true middle ground between the ascetic Gnostics, who rejected marriage altogether, and the Catholics, who allowed more than one."<sup>35</sup> In this effort to prove the evil of second marriages perhaps he did not fully realize how logically he was also

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<sup>33</sup> Ad Uxorem, I, 5.

<sup>34</sup> De Monogamia, 16.

<sup>35</sup> Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church (Ante-Nicene Christianity, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1883), I, 367.

arguing against marriage at all. He considered marriage a spiritual union that was only suspended, not broken, at death, making second marriages a species of adultery. In relation to her departed husband, a widow, he says "prays for his soul, and requests refreshment for him meanwhile, and fellowship [with him] in the first resurrection; and she offers [her sacrifice] on the anniversaries of his falling asleep."<sup>36</sup> Consequently a second marriage would mean that "two wives beset the same husband--one in the spirit, one in flesh."<sup>37</sup> As proof, he cites the difficult saying that in the resurrection "they neither marry, nor are given in marriage"<sup>38</sup> declaring that this shows that all will be bound to departed consorts since there will be no restitution of the conjugal relation in the resurrection.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, it is necessary to consider what Tertullian has to say about a woman's position and duties should she marry. It has already been noted that he places the female sex in a subordinate position because of the part played in the original sin. In marriage, the lordship and love of the man in relation to the woman is affirmed: "Fleshly concupiscence . . . pleads the necessity of a husband to the female

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<sup>36</sup> De Monogamia, 10.

<sup>37</sup> De Exhortatione Castitatis, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Matthew 22:30; Mark 12:25; Luke 20:35-36.

<sup>39</sup> De Monogamia, 10.



sex, as a source of authority and of comfort, or to render it safe from evil rumours."<sup>40</sup> Again he says, "Submit your head to your husbands, and you will be enough adorned." Continuing, he says something about a woman's duties: "Busy your hands with spinning; keep your feet at home; and you will 'please' better than [by arraying yourselves] in gold."<sup>41</sup> As in other writers, so here the woman's sphere is the home of which the husband is the head.<sup>42</sup>

Virgins. In the light of all the above-mentioned emphasis on virginity, a logical question would be, Does Tertullian give indication of the existence of an order of virgins in his time? Polycarp's admonition at the beginning of the second century that the virgins' vows should be known only to the bishop has been cited. A hundred years later Tertullian is battling to maintain the private character of dedicating one's life to celibacy, for there had appeared in the churches virgins sitting unveiled in the group.

The meaning of this was that, as girls under the betrothal age of twelve years wore no veils, a claim had been made by certain dedicated virgins to continue the symbolic freedom of the age of innocence, and at least in church to lay aside the covering which elsewhere public opinion enforced.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ad Uxorem, I, 4.

<sup>41</sup> De Cultu Feminarum, II, 13.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Ad Uxorem, II, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Edward White Benson, Cyprian His Life, His Times, His Work (London: Macmillan and Co., 1897), p. 53.

Those who allowed this liberty argued that Paul in 1 Corinthians 11 insisted only that women, not virgins, be veiled. If he had desired virgins to be covered he would have said so, just as he spoke a special word concerning them in chapter seven of the same letter. Tertullian's reply is highly significant. The governing principle is that just as the body includes the parts so the designation woman includes the virgin.<sup>44</sup> He cleverly uses the word "Blessed art thou among women" spoken to the Virgin Mary<sup>45</sup> to show that "the angel withal knew that even a virgin is called a woman."<sup>46</sup> Then, elaborating on the basis of this principle he declares:

It is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither [is it permitted her] to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say sacerdotal office. Let us inquire whether any of these be lawful to a virgin. If it is not lawful to a virgin, but she is subjected on the selfsame terms [as the woman], and the necessity for humility is assigned her together with the woman, whence will this one thing be lawful to her which is not lawful to any and every female? Is the reason why it is granted her to dispense with the veil, that she may be notable and marked as she enters the church? that she may display the honour of sanctity in the liberty of her head? More worthy distinction could have been conferred on her by according her some prerogative of manly rank or office!<sup>47</sup>

The rest of Tertullian's argument need not concern us, for the outstanding relevant points have been made. They are: (1) In the fact

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<sup>44</sup> De Virginibus Velandis, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Luke 1:28.

<sup>46</sup> De Virginibus Velandis, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 9.

that certain churches did have the custom of allowing its virgins to appear in the congregation unveiled is seen evidence of the first beginnings in Tertullian's time of the process which separated outwardly a virgin from her fellow-Christians. "But Tertullian will have none of it, and it is possible that his influence did something to retard the process in the West."<sup>48</sup> But in Tertullian, in no sense, are virgins considered an order. (2) No special function, and by all means, no liturgical function was assigned to virgins any more than to other women. In all these respects the virgin is in the same position as other Christian women. (3) To these two may be added a third consideration which was not noted above but which shows something of the virgin's relationship to the church.

. . . the brotherhood readily undertakes the maintenance of virgins. . . . [They are] brought forth into the midst [of the church], and elated by the public appropriation of their property, and laden by the brethren with every honour and charitable bounty, so long as they do not fall. . . .<sup>49</sup>

How this practice can be reconciled with the maiden's devotion being known to God alone is a mystery. Possibly the practice of these Montanist virgins, to whom all of this was addressed, and though still not an order in any sense, was such that virgins' vows were known beyond the bishop, yet modesty was expected of them to the extent that they

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<sup>48</sup> C. H. Turner, "Ministries of Women in the Primitive Church," The Ministry of Women (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> De Virginibus Velandis, 14.

should not appear unlike their contemporaries in age, though all of this falls short of the ideal private dedication known only to God.

Widows. During the whole of the second century the widow and not the virgin was the prominent figure. Widows were enrolled in an order and were assigned the work of intercession for the church. Because this is so and because consequently they must have been considered in some sense dedicated, it is not surprising to discover in Tertullian's time that widows had a place assigned to them in the churches which was analogous to that of the elders. He speaks of this in discussing the matter of the repentant sinner of the Corinthian epistles.

Why, do you yourself, when introducing into the church, for the purpose of melting the brotherhood by his prayers, the repentant adulterer, lead into the midst and prostrate him, all in haircloth and ashes, a compound of disgrace and horror, before the widows, before the elders, suing for the tears of all, licking the foot-prints of all, clasping the knees of all?<sup>50</sup>

Virgins certainly had no such place of honor; indeed, they were not to be distinguishable in the congregation.

Tertullian assigns two reasons for this honor which widows enjoy over virgins.

For, concerning the honours which widowhood enjoys in the sight of God, there is a brief summary in one saying of His through the prophet: "Do thou justly to the widow and to the orphan; and come ye, let us reason, saith the Lord" (Isa. 1:17-18). These two names . . . the Father of all undertakes to defend. . . . Not to virgins, I take it, is so great a gift given. Although in their case perfect integrity and entire sanctity shall have the nearest vision of the face of God, yet the widow has a task more toilsome, because it

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<sup>50</sup> De Pudicitia, 13.

is not easy to crave after that which you know not, and to turn away from what you have never had to regret. More glorious is the continence which is aware of its own right, which knows what it has seen. The virgin may possibly be held the happier, but the widow the more hardly tasked. . . . In the former it is grace, in the latter virtue, that is crowned.<sup>51</sup>

Specific regulations governed admittance into the catalogue of widows. The minimum age was sixty years; widows were to be married once and only once; and they were to be mothers. All of this is to be seen when Tertullian expostulates:

I know plainly, that in a certain place a virgin of less than twenty years of age has been placed in the order of widows! whereas if the bishop had been bound to accord her any relief, he might, of course, have done it in some other way without detriment to the respect due to discipline; that such a miracle, not to say monster, should not be pointed at in the church, a virgin-widow! the more portentous indeed, that not even as a widow did she veil her head; denying herself either way; both as virgin, in that she is counted a widow, and as widow, in that she is styled a virgin. But the authority which licenses her sitting in that seat uncovered is the same which allows her to sit here as a virgin; A seat to which (besides the "sixty years") not merely "single-husbanded" [women] --that is, married women--are at length elected, but "mothers" to boot, yes, and "Educators of children;" in order, forsooth, that their experimental training in all the affections may, on the one hand, have rendered them capable of readily aiding all others with counsel and comfort, and that, on the other, they may none the less have travelled down the whole course of probation whereby a female can be tested. So true is it, that, on the ground of her position, nothing in the way of public honour is permitted to a virgin.<sup>52</sup>

It will be remembered that St. Ignatius spoke of "virgins who are called widows," suggesting the application of the title virgin to widows who did not remarry. Tertullian also speaks in a similar way,

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<sup>51</sup> Ad Uxorem, I, 8.

<sup>52</sup> De Virginibus Velandis, 9; cf. Ad Uxorem, I, 7.

calling widows who do not marry again God's brides.<sup>53</sup> Though his statement is not clear, this is probably what Morgan has reference to when he says, referring to widows, that "their status was regarded as of a sanctity almost equal to that of virgins."<sup>54</sup> One must not gather the impression that virgins were the outstanding group--that would be false; but if the emphasis is kept on the word sanctity, the statement is true. Thus the honor paid to widows was linked with celibacy, and "it is no doubt in part this conception of the consecrated widow that made it so easy in later generations to bring the widow and the virgin into near relation to one another."<sup>55</sup>

The public ministry of women. Having considered this father's views concerning marriage, virgins, and widows, we must finally consider what he has to say regarding the part women play in public ministry. We have already noticed that he suggests that woman's ministry is in the home. Emphasizing that, he answers the question, Why should women appear in public, by declaring:

You, however, [in contrast to Gentile women who go to the temple and public shows] have no cause of appearing in public, except such as is serious. Either some brother who is sick is visited,

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<sup>53</sup> Ad Uxorem, I, 4.

<sup>54</sup> James Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1928), p. 126.

<sup>55</sup> Turner, op. cit., p. 90.



or else the sacrifice is offered, or else the word of God is dispensed.<sup>56</sup>

That a woman does not have the right to dispense the word of God in the public assembly is evident when he writes concerning a certain Quintilla who taught against baptism: "And so that most monstrous creature, who had no right to teach even sound doctrine [as being a woman], knew full well how to kill the little fishes, by taking them away from the water."<sup>57</sup> Speaking further of women who belonged to heretical sects, he says: "The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures--it may be even to baptize."<sup>58</sup> Generally, Tertullian considered it the exclusive right of the bishop to baptize though he admits that presbyters and deacons with the bishop's permission may perform baptism. He even admits that there may be occasions when laymen shall have to do it, but what he thinks of women baptizing is clearly revealed in the following:

But if the writings which wrongly go under Paul's name, claim Thecla's example as a licence for women's teaching and baptizing, let them know that, in Asia, the presbyter who composed that writing [Acta Pauli et Theclae], as if he were augmenting Paul's fame from his own store, after being convicted, and confessing that he had done it from love of Paul, was removed from his office. For how credible would it seem that he who has not permitted a woman even to learn with over-boldness, should give a female the power of

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<sup>56</sup> De Cultu Feminarum, II, 11. This is a pre-Montanist writing.

<sup>57</sup> De Baptismo, 1.

<sup>58</sup> De Praescriptione Haereticorum, 41.



teaching and of baptizing! "Let them be silent," he says, "and at home consult their own husbands."<sup>59</sup>

In embracing Montanism one would expect that Tertullian's views on this matter would have become less strict. And indeed, there is a relaxing of his views, and yet, if relaxing be too strong a word certainly there was a more careful and detailed defining of his viewpoint on the public ministry of women. Some passages uphold the same strictness. One such, already cited in another connection, affirms that "it is not permitted to a woman to speak in the church; but neither [is it permitted her\_] to teach, nor to baptize, nor to offer, nor to claim to herself a lot in any manly function, not to say sacerdotal office."<sup>60</sup> This is not an isolated passage, for in writing against Marcion he declares:

In precisely the same manner, when enjoining on women silence in the church, that they speak not for the mere sake of learning (although that even they have the right of prophesying, he [the Holy Spirit\_] has already shown when he covers the woman that prophesies with a veil), he goes to the law for his sanction that woman should be under obedience.<sup>61</sup>

Whether this latter passage indicates a liberty with relation to woman's ministry in the church that came with Tertullian's acceptance of Montanism, or whether it is merely a further explanation of the only circumstance under which a woman could open her mouth in the assembly

<sup>59</sup> De Baptismo, 17.

<sup>60</sup> De Virginibus Velandis, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Adversus Marcion, V, 8.

is difficult to decide since there is no passage from his pre-Montanist writings with which to compare. One inclines to consider it explanation because in the same treatise (De Virginibus Velandis) where he so emphatically says that a woman should not teach, he carefully describes the dimensions of the veil in these explicit terms: "Its limits and boundaries reach as far as the place where the robe begins. The region of the veil is co-extensive with the space covered by the hair when unbound; in order that the necks too may be encircled."<sup>62</sup> This might be taken as an indication that properly veiled women could prophesy.

However, it is clear that Tertullian approved of women receiving revelations. The circumstances under which Tertullian would approve of the ministry of prophetesses are made clear in one very revealing passage (written concerning a Montanist assembly) where he declares:

We have now amongst us a sister whose lot it has been to be favoured with sundry gifts of revelation, which she experiences in the Spirit by ecstatic vision amidst the sacred rites of the Lord's day in the church: she converses with angels, and sometimes even with the Lord; she both sees and hears mysterious communications. Some men's hearts she understands, and to them who are in need she distributes remedies. Whether it be in the reading of the Scriptures, or in the chanting of psalms, or in the preaching of sermons, or in the offering up of prayers, in all these religious services matter and opportunity are afforded to her of seeing visions. . . . After the people are dismissed at the conclusion of the sacred services, she is in the regular habit of reporting to us whatever things she may have seen in a vision (for all her communications are examined with the most scrupulous care, in order that their truth may be proved.) . . . and the apostle most assuredly foretold that there were to be "spiritual gifts" in the church.

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<sup>62</sup> Chapter 17.

Now, can you refuse to believe this, even if indubitable evidence on every point is forthcoming for your conviction?<sup>63</sup>

This certainly bears telltale marks of Montanist influence, yet one is impressed with the orderliness of such activity in this sect.

One further fact is necessary to complete the picture of Tertullian's mind on this subject. Like Clement, he understands the women of 1 Corinthians 9:1-5 not to be wives but women who ministered to the apostles in the same way as those who ministered to Jesus. He does not say whether or not he would approve of it in his own day.<sup>64</sup>

In public ministry, then, Tertullian grants more freedom to women than those who went before him. But it is very little more, for like others he considered the sphere of woman to be the home, but he talks less of that and much more of virgins, widows, and prophesying, all of which seems to indicate that women were taking a larger place in public life. Montanism influenced his thinking especially in relation to prophetesses, and yet in it all he thinks that he is following the apostolic order.

#### IV. CYPRIAN'S LIFE AND TIMES

From the days of Tertullian to those of Augustine the name of Thascius Cyprian alone is outstanding in the African church. Like so

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<sup>63</sup> De Anima, 9.

<sup>64</sup> De Monogamia, 8.

many of the early fathers, Cyprian speaks very little of his unconverted days. He was evidently a man of means, education, a master of rhetoric and probably an advocate, but of his date and place of birth nothing is known. He was converted to Christianity, however, in the year 246, in middle life, which makes it likely that he was born about the turn of the century. He lived only eleven years after his conversion, but in that time rose rapidly in position and influence in the church. Less than three years after his baptism he became bishop of Carthage to the objection of some presbyters (since they still considered him a novice) but with overwhelming support of the laity. During the persecution under Decius, Cyprian fled Carthage because he thought his life was more necessary to the welfare of the church than his death, but under the persecution of Valerian he was beheaded in 257 A. D.<sup>65</sup>

Cyprian considered Tertullian his master whose works he studied diligently. In another way, too, Tertullian was Cyprian's master, for his writings display far more spiritual depth than his successor's. Cyprian sought to constrain from without, not from within, or as another has well put it: "But while Tertullian strives to subjugate the will, Cyprian aims rather at dictating the course of action."<sup>66</sup> Cyprian demanded obedience to the bishop, and strict administration and

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<sup>65</sup> Pontius, Life and Passion of Cyprian, Bishop and Martyr.

<sup>66</sup> Cruttwell, II, 596.

careful organization were characteristics of his own rule in the Church. In no way, however, was he self-seeking, as is witnessed by his act of selling his farms upon his conversion, but such a dominant character with so strong qualities of leadership were bound to raise opposition. During his times there were serious controversies over those who lapsed in their faith during the Decian persecution and over the rebaptism of heretics and schismatics. Just after his selection as bishop he had to deal with a serious matter which concerned holy women and men living together. In the handling of these difficult questions Cyprian's character is attested to by the true statement that in his answers "we recognise the gentleness of the Christian, as well as the prudence of the man of the world, and the sagacious judgment of the ruler."<sup>67</sup>

#### V. CYPRIAN'S VIEWS RELATIVE TO THE STATUS OF WOMEN

"Neither male nor female . . . in Christ Jesus." Refreshingly, Cyprian has a word about the oneness of the body of Christ without distinction of sex. He compares the giving of the Holy Spirit without measure to the account in Exodus:

. . . when the manna flowed down from heaven, and, prefiguring the things to come, showed forth the nourishment of the heavenly bread and the food of the coming Christ. For there, without distinction either of sex or of age, an omer was collected equally by each one.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., II, 600.

Whence it appeared that the mercy of Christ, and the heavenly grace that would subsequently follow, was equally divided among all; without difference of sex, without distinction of years, without accepting of persons, upon all the people of God the gift of spiritual grace was shed.<sup>68</sup>

Concrete demonstration of this equality of the sexes was to be found in the female martyrs, and "it was the frequent boast of Christian writers that their faith had given moral and spiritual renewal, and a fortitude that could defy the severest tortures, to men and women alike, not to mention children and slaves."<sup>69</sup> Cyprian, for instance, says:

Blessed women also, who are established with you in the same glory of confession, who maintaining the Lord's faith, and braver than their sex, not only themselves are near to the crown of glory, but have afforded an example to other women by their constancy!<sup>70</sup>

With the triumphing men come women also, who, while contending with the world, have also overcome their sex; and virgins also come with the double glory of their warfare, and boys transcending their years with their virtues.<sup>71</sup>

In this idea of "overcoming their sex" one suspects that Cyprian is implying that the female is the weaker sex, but exactly how he might interpret this is uncertain from his writings. Of the unity and equality of the sexes in spiritual bonds there is no question. Even in the spiritual activity of martyrdom there is equality. However, women were not to be active in speaking in the church, for in the collection of

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<sup>68</sup> Epistle 75 (Oxford ed. 69), 14.

<sup>69</sup> Cadoux, op. cit., p. 597.

<sup>70</sup> Epistle 80 (Oxford ed. 6), 3.

<sup>71</sup> On the Lapsed, 2.

divine precepts known as Testimonies Against the Jews Cyprian states clearly "that a woman ought to be silent in the church." Scriptural support of that declaration he finds in 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11-14.<sup>72</sup> It is the quotation of the Timothy passage that is significant when it is used in this connection, for it bases subordination of the woman on the order of God's creative act, and this subordination prohibits a woman from teaching in the church. Thus Cyprian's idea of equality is limited in its sphere, for the concept of subordination is definitely related to his judgment concerning a woman's activity in the church.

Widows. Cyprian has very little to say about widows in the church. He declares that the church was noted for "so many praiseworthy widows,"<sup>73</sup> and mentions the women who ministered to Christ as being widows but only in connection with a treatise on alms.<sup>74</sup> Apart from these references, nothing further is said about widows. In contrast, much space is devoted to virgins. It must not be assumed from this, however, that virgins had superseded widows in the prominent place, for much of what he says to the virgins is a result of abuse and wrong conduct on their part which called for strenuous and verbose

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<sup>72</sup> Book III, Number 46.

<sup>73</sup> Epistle 68 (Oxford ed. 66), 7.

<sup>74</sup> On Works and Alms, 6.



writing on the part of the bishop who was concerned with the efficient administration of the church. Thus it is better concluded that there was no change in the picture concerning widows from the time of Tertullian, and that they still occupied the honored place as a recognized order in the church.

Chastity. Again, the genuine works of Cyprian contain very little concerning the matter of chastity and celibacy. His biographer, Pontius, says of Cyprian:

While his faith was in its first rudiments, he believed that before God nothing was worthy in comparison of the observance of continency. For he thought that the heart might then become what it ought to be, and the mind attain to the full capacity of truth, if he trod under foot the lust of the flesh with the robust and healthy vigour of holiness.<sup>75</sup>

In the Testimonies Against the Jews<sup>76</sup> Cyprian speaks "of the benefit of virginity and continency," and he cites the following Scriptures:

Genesis 3:16; Matthew 19:11-12; Luke 20:34-38; 1 Corinthians 7:1-7, 32-34; Exodus 19:15; 1 Samuel 21:4; Revelation 14:4. However, he does not apply this principle except to the virgins, and concerning the relative merit of marriage and celibacy he says nothing.

Virgins. Cyprian's main contribution to the theme is in relation to virgins. That his esteem of them is very high is evident from

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<sup>75</sup> Pontius, op. cit., 2.

<sup>76</sup> Book III, Number 32.

his ranking them next to the martyrs.<sup>77</sup> He says further that "the church, crowned with so many virgins, flourishes."<sup>78</sup> Again, virgins are described as those:

. . . whose glory, as it is more eminent, excites the greater interest. This is the flower of the ecclesiastical seed, the grace and ornament of spiritual endowment, a joyous disposition, the wholesome and uncorrupted work of praise and honour, God's image answering to the holiness of the Lord, the more illustrious portion of Christ's flock. . . . and in proportion as a copious virginity is added to her [the church's] number, so much more it increases the joy of the Mother [i.e. the church].<sup>79</sup>

It was these virgins, however, who caused Cyprian one of his first problems as bishop of Carthage, for virgins were found living in the same houses and even the same rooms with men in a spiritual relationship.

The situation is described by Cyprian:

. . . what we thought of those virgins who, after having once determined to continue in their condition, and firmly to maintain their continency, have afterwards been found to have remained in the same bed side by side with men; of whom you say that one is a deacon; and yet that the same virgins who have confessed that they have slept with men declare that they are chaste.<sup>80</sup>

In commenting on this situation, another has observed:

To Christians of to-day, virgins occupying the same house with men, often the same room and even the same bed, could not be understood. But in the early centuries that was a common custom, probably due to the necessity of finding houses for converted girls and women

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<sup>77</sup> On the Morality, 26 and Epistle 54 (Oxford ed. 59), 13.

<sup>78</sup> Epistle 51 (Oxford ed. 55), 20.

<sup>79</sup> On the Dress of Virgins, 3.

<sup>80</sup> Epistle 61 (Oxford ed. 4), 1.

who had been disowned by parents. Then, in the exaltation of Christian enthusiasm, in the prophetic ecstasy which characterized some early Christians, in that exaggerated estimate of virginity which was very early introduced, with the freshness of faith in the power of the new life, there can be no doubt that this relation of dwelling together of men and women pledged to virginity, was often, . . . absolutely innocent of immorality. But as time passed and the old enthusiasm died away, and especially as the persecutions ceased and crowds came into the Church, it is evident that this spiritual bond did not always remain spiritual. This was recognized by the Council of Nicea, A. D. 325, which prohibited this practice [Canon 3], as did also that of Carthage of 348 [Canons 3,4]. Cyprian had to meet this scandal. . . .<sup>81</sup>

And meet it he does in a most thorough and straightforward manner. His plea is for discipline, and he emphatically declares that the overseers should

. . . not suffer virgins to dwell with men,--I do not say to sleep together, but to live together,--since both their weak sex and their age, still critical, ought to be bridled in all things and ruled by us, lest an occasion should be given to the devil who ensnares us. . . . Moreover, what a number of serious mischiefs we see to have arisen hence; and what a multitude of virgins we behold corrupted by unlawful and dangerous conjunctions of this kind, to our great grief of mind! But if they have faithfully dedicated themselves to Christ, let them persevere in modesty and chastity, without incurring any evil report, and so in courage and steadiness await the reward of virginity. But if they are unwilling or unable to persevere, it is better that they should marry, than that by their crimes they should fall into the fire.<sup>82</sup>

He insists that it is quite right to excommunicate the deacon and others who were found sleeping with virgins, but if after inspection by midwives virgins "should be found virgins, let them be received to

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<sup>81</sup> John Alfred Faulkner, Cyprian: The Churchman (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1906), pp. 52-53.

<sup>82</sup> Epistle 61, 2.

communion, and admitted to the church."<sup>83</sup> If one does not pass such a test then

let her abundantly repent, because she who has been guilty of this crime is an adulteress, not against a husband, but against Christ; and therefore, a due time being appointed, let her afterwards, when confession has been made, return to the church.<sup>84</sup>

A second problem that confronted Cyprian concerned the dress of the virgins. Tertullian, it will be remembered, devoted a treatise to this subject in which he urged that virgins should be indistinguishable from other women and should therefore be veiled. Cyprian also devoted a treatise to this subject, many of the phrases of which are exactly the same as Tertullian's, but he was meeting a tendency on the part of the virgins to be too much like other women in the matter of clothing and jewelry. Since virginity, he argues, means holiness in body and spirit, a virgin

ought not only to be so, but also to be perceived and believed to be so: no one on seeing a virgin should be in any doubt as to whether she is one. . . . Why should she walk out adorned? Why with dressed hair, as if she either had or sought for a husband?<sup>85</sup>

After much detailed argument in which he appeals to many Scriptures<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 3, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Loc. cit.

<sup>85</sup> On the Dress of Virgins, 5.

<sup>86</sup> No less than 35 Scriptures are cited or alluded to in the treatise.

his conclusion is this:

Let your countenance remain in your incorrupt, your neck unadorned, your figure simple; let not wounds be made in your ears, nor let the precious chain of bracelets and necklaces circle your arms or your neck; let your feet be free from golden bands, your hair stained with no dye, your eyes worthy of beholding God. Let your baths be performed with women, whose bathing is modest towards you. Let the shameless feasts and lascivious banquets of marriages be avoided, the contagion of which is perilous. Overcome dress, since you are a virgin; overcome gold, since you overcome the flesh and the world.<sup>87</sup>

Furthermore, those virgins who were advanced in years were to suggest good teaching to the younger ones, and the younger ones were to be examples to their contemporaries.<sup>88</sup>

The minutiae in this treatise are not what particularly concern us; the important question is, Can there be seen in this a beginning of an order of virgins in the church? Benson answers in the affirmative because he considers that Cyprian treats virgins

as a practical and precious institution, without breaking like Tertullian into wild reproaches against mere corrigible vanities which occurred, not yet glorifying the order with the title of Brides of Christ. Self-dedication and the unmarried state were considered a Christian 'work' in the same sense in which Almsgiving was 'work.' . . . Obviously we are in the rudiments of organization when Cyprian suggests to the elder women to assume some position, and to the younger to pay them some deference.<sup>89</sup>

It is true that the elder virgins are to assume a position toward the

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<sup>87</sup> On the Dress of Virgins, 21.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>89</sup> Benson, op. cit., p. 52.

younger as cited above.<sup>90</sup> It is also true that Cyprian is more restrained than Tertullian and even says to the virgins:

I exhort with affection rather than with power; not that I would claim, last and least, and very conscious of my lowliness as I am, any right to censure, but because, being unceasingly careful even to solicitude, I fear more from the onset of Satan.<sup>91</sup>

However, Benson's argument does not seem convincing. In the first place, why is it "obvious" that there is a rudimentary organization in the mention of different age groups among the virgins? Virgins consisted of women of different ages, and it would be quite natural without any organizing coming into the matter that the older virgins should set the example for the younger ones. In addition, had Benson not used this as an argument, one would have been inclined to make nothing more of this than simply another of Cyprian's many allusions to Scripture (Titus 2 in this instance).

Cyprian's different style from that of Tertullian might just as naturally be attributed to his different character as to the rise of a kind of organization which Benson implies. Tertullian would be given to "wild reproaches" while Cyprian would not. Furthermore, it seems like a very insubstantial argument to cite difference in style when actually so much of Cyprian's work in this treatise is not only based on Tertullian's but when much of the very language is exactly the same.

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<sup>90</sup> Provectae annis, iunioribus facite magisterium; minores natu, praebebe comparibus incitamentum.

<sup>91</sup> On the Dress of Virgins, 3.

It can, therefore, scarcely be said that there was anything like the rudiments of an order of virgins in Cyprian's time, although it is not difficult to see trends beginning which made it easy for the order to appear in later times. The increasing prominence given to virgins, the matters related to dress and distinguishability in the congregation, and the decided merit placed on celibacy comprise such trends. A definite trend is one thing; an evident organization is quite another.

Thus, in the African fathers the widow is the prominent figure though virgins compose a large but unorganized group in the church. Neither widows nor virgins have a specially defined ministry to the church, and deaconesses do not appear at all in any of the writings.



## CHAPTER XIII

### CHURCH ORDERS

There remains yet to be considered among the non-canonical writings the body of literature known as the Church Orders. One might suspect or even wish that this would be a large body of literature, for in the course of events it would not have seemed unlikely that the early church should have wanted to codify regulations which existed in the days of the Apostles for the conduct of the Christian assemblies. Similar matters were dealt with by the apostles as witnessed by the attention given in their writings to such details as seating people in church, visiting the sick, regular meetings of the church, and the necessity of work.<sup>1</sup> But, as the first leaders passed away, it was not the codifying of regulations for the conduct of the community which was first felt to be necessary but rather the writing down of the message of the Christian faith together with the facts, incidents, traditions, and stories surrounding the life of the Founder.

Though it may seem strange that the customs of the churches were not systematically written down at the same time, it is a fact that they were not. Apart from the Didaché it is not until the third century that Church Orders appear in the extant literature. Even at that, it appears that:

. . . they were not regarded as widely authoritative, and that it was the instinctive feeling of the Church that traditions of this

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<sup>1</sup> James 2:1-9; 1:27; Hebrews 10:25; 1 Thessalonians 5:27; 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12.

kind, fettering the free development of Church legislation on things indifferent, were of minor importance, if not harmful. . . They compare unfavourably not only with the canonical books but with genuine Sub-Apostolic literature.<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, one would recall at this point, with possibly some surprise, that in all of the passages cited in the previous pages from the writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers bearing on the status of women, there is not one single reference to any writing that might be called a Church Order either as a basis of authority or as an evidence of existing custom. There are many references to the literature of the New Testament and many claims to be following the teaching of the Apostles, but references to Church Orders are totally lacking.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that the Church Orders are without any value or, at the most, of little value. For the historian every piece of evidence is important; equally important is the proper evaluation of the evidence. It becomes imperative to discover the place of writing of, the date of, and the relevant material in these documents, for, although they were not considered binding on the churches, they do give a picture of the practice of the churches in those days. However, Bartlet's word of warning in connection with this study is most appropriate:

There is further difficulty in connexion with the accurate use of them as historical evidence for processes of change in practice and in the ideas behind such change. For not one of those

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<sup>2</sup> John Wordsworth, The Ministry of Grace (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), p. 15.

Church-Orders which we have to handle is strictly speaking a unit: they all include different historic strata side by side, whether by way of simple accretion by means of additions or interpolations, or in virtue of the working-up of earlier historical units into some fresh organic synthesis, due to a single moulding mind, like the author of the 'Apostolic Constitutions,' our chief specimen of that type.<sup>3</sup>

Only three of these Church Orders (not counting the Didaché which has been dealt with) belong to the Ante-Nicene period. They are: The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus, the Apostolic Church Order, and the Didascalia. The Testament of the Lord, another Church Order with an apocryphal setting making considerable use of the Apostolic Tradition is probably as late as the fifth century.<sup>4</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions, which embody the Didascalia in Books I-VI, the Didaché in Book VII, and the Apostolic Tradition in Book VIII, "can now with some confidence be assigned to a date about A. D. 375 and to the region of

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<sup>3</sup> James Vernon Bartlet, Church-Life and Church-Order (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1943), pp. 153-54.

<sup>4</sup> J. Armitage Robinson, "Deaconesses in the 'Apostolic Constitutions,'" The Ministry of Women (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1919), p. 77.

Antioch."<sup>5</sup> These later documents concern us in this thesis only as they are related to the earlier Church Orders which were used as sources.

## I. THE APOSTOLIC TRADITION

Bartlet has quite rightly stated concerning the Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus that: "The subject lying behind this title is one of the most complicated, and until quite recently one of the most enigmatic, of those connected with Church-Orders as a branch of ecclesiastical literature."<sup>6</sup> It is not necessary to the purpose or within the scope of this section to deal in detail with all the technical and critical problems related to this document. Certain matters, however, are

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<sup>5</sup> Bartlet, op. cit., p. 145. Older scholarship placed the date of the composition of this work at the end of the third century. Cf. G. C. Krabbe, "An Essay, Historical and Critical, on the Origin and Contents of the Apostolical Constitutions," The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1848), pp. 359-60. Turner places the compilation between 360-380 and prefers the earlier date because of the Arianisms in the work. He has certainly shown that the Constitutions could not be later than the fourth century. He says: "But it is not likely that after about the year A. D. 400 there would have been on Greek ground any movement for Arianizing Catholic or non-Arian literature; the movement would have been the other way at that date, just as at the time when the Constitutions were compiled, somewhere about A. D. 360-380, there is a real probability that an Antiochene writer would have been some sort of an Arian. If we were to push back the date of the Constitutions another twenty years, the presumption would be stronger still: If, with Funk, we bring down the date of the compilation to the beginning of the fifth century, the presumption of Arianism would disappear. . . ." Cf. C. H. Turner, "Notes on the Apostolic Constitutions," The Journal of Theological Studies (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, XVI, October 1914), p. 54.

<sup>6</sup> Bartlet, op. cit., p. 105.

extremely important and must be considered. They are three: authorship, date of writing, and value.

Authorship. Connolly has decisively demonstrated that the anti-Pope and martyr Hippolytus was the author of this treatise.<sup>7</sup> This at once relates it to Rome and to conditions which pertained there at a certain period. Hippolytus himself was a controversial figure, and this work of his was in fact a work written in midst of controversy. The prologue and epilogue say in substance that where Christian life is so ordered, i.e., after the pattern of this manual, there, and only there, will be found an authentic assembly and true doctrine. This does not mean, however, that because this was a work of controversy it is subject to bias and inaccuracies. Indeed, the circumstances surrounding its writing argue for the opposite conclusion. Another summarizes it this way:

He is openly attacking what he considers the innovating tendencies of those with whom he is at loggerheads on other grounds by making a public appeal to the past. In the circumstances it is of the very essence of his case that he should, for the most part at least, be really doing what he says he is doing, setting down

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<sup>7</sup> Don R. Hugh Connolly, The So-Called Egyptian Church Order and Derived Documents (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1916), pp. 147-49. Cf. also E. Schwartz, Über die pseudoapostolischen Kirchenordnungen (Schriften der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft in Strassburg, vi, 1910).

genuine old Roman customs and rules of which the memory of Roman Christians then "went not back to the contrary."<sup>8</sup>

The question of authorship, then, is vitally linked with the question of locale and accuracy.

Date. Dix, for reasons which need not be reproduced here, places the date of writing not in the first years after the accession in 217 of Hippolytus' rival Callistus as Pope, but rather in the closing years of the previous Pope, Zephyrinus.<sup>9</sup> This would place the composition in the year 215. If this be the correct date (and Dix's reasons are convincing) it means that Hippolytus was not yet the head of a sect the practices of which he could regulate according to his own pleasure and that he would be likely to reproduce faithfully the practice of the contemporary church. This reinforces what has been said above.

Value. If the above be correct, and if it is remembered that Hippolytus was not composing a set of original rules but was merely setting down existing customs then

we may safely take it that in outline and essentials the rites and customs to which the Apostolic Tradition bears witness were those

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<sup>8</sup> Gregory Dix, The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St Hippolytus of Rome (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1937), p. xxxviii.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. xxxv-xxxvii.

practised in the Roman Church in his own day, and in his own youth c. A. D. 180.<sup>10</sup>

Further, it probably represented generally the practice of the whole church in that period, for although it did not have much influence in the Roman Church, it does represent its customs, and we know from the use made of it in the Apostolic Constitutions that it was circulated and followed in Syria. Dix sums up the value of this work well:

We can watch Hippolytus at work on his material, adapting and supplementing a little here and there with his own comments, perhaps in one or two cases misunderstanding the origin and intention of the practices already ancient which he describes. But making all due allowance for these cases, there remains a much larger part of the contents, some of it supported by allusions in other writers, of which we can safely say that his material comes to him rather than from him. It represents the mind and practice not of St Hippolytus only but of the whole Catholic Church and of the second century. As such it is of outstanding importance.<sup>11</sup>

What, then does this important document say that bears on the status of women in that day? Concerning widows,<sup>12</sup> it states three important facts: First, widows were not ordained ( $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\omicron\tau\omicron\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$ ) as were bishops, presbyters, and deacons. The reason for this is specifically stated--"because she does not offer the oblation nor has she a liturgical ministry."<sup>13</sup> Second, widows who had been tested for a time were

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. xxxix-xi.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. xlii.

<sup>12</sup> Section xi.

<sup>13</sup> xi. 4.



allowed to be enrolled on the church's lists.<sup>14</sup> This means, evidently, that there were two groups of widows or at least that there were widows and probationers. Third, the ministry of widows besides being stated negatively as not being liturgical (λειτουργία) is stated positively as being that of prayer. Further, they were to be ministered to in material things by members of the congregation.<sup>15</sup>

Of virgins it is only stated: "The Virgin is not appointed but voluntarily separated and named. A Virgin does not have an imposition of hands, for personal choice alone is that which makes a virgin."<sup>16</sup> This is quite in line with what has been discovered from other writings; i.e., in the earlier days of church history widows assumed a far more prominent place than virgins who did not become anything like an order until near the end of the Ante-Nicene period.

In the assembly itself the women were to "stand . . . by themselves apart from the men, both the baptised women and the women catechumens."<sup>17</sup> In addition, there was a regulation concerning veiling: "Moreover let all the women have their heads veiled with a scarf (πάλλον) but not with a veil of linen only, for that is not a

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, VI, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Section xxvii.

<sup>16</sup> Section xiii.

<sup>17</sup> xviii. 1.

sufficient covering (κάλυμμα)."<sup>18</sup> This is not connected, at least in the manual, with the fall of man or inferiority of the female sex.

One further regulation is of interest. Hippolytus says: "If a man's concubine be a slave, let her hear [the word] on condition that she have reared her children, and if she consorts with him alone. But if not let her be rejected."<sup>19</sup> The practice of slavery with all its abuses continually harassed the Church with problems. Among such problems was that of the unions between slaves and freemen. Roman law did not recognize any union with a slave as full marriage (matrimonium) but only as a concubinage (contubernium). Even if such a union were permanent, it was never recognized as marriage before the law. The Church, therefore, took steps to elevate the status of slave women by recognizing as full Christian marriage a slave's concubinage provided she reared the children and consorted with one man only. This is the meaning of the regulation in the Apostolic Tradition. Such a girl was not only considered married but was then allowed to enter the fellowship of the Church. Thus Christianity did for women in this instance what Roman law would not do by insisting on her human and religious dignity and right. In effect the Church created its own ecclesiastical law of marriage in contrast to the civil law and in so doing elevated the status of a certain group of women in the Church.

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<sup>18</sup> xviii. 5.

<sup>19</sup> xvi. 24.

There is no doubt that Christian girls within the Church outnumbered the youths, which of course means that there was always the risk of girls of good position either marrying pagans or forming illicit relations with them when they could not find a suitable Christian man of equal rank. Some evidently were "unwilling to lose caste by marrying any Christian beneath them."<sup>20</sup> Tertullian attempted to remedy the situation by advising Christian girls who possessed property to marry poor young men.<sup>21</sup> Callistus endeavored to do something about this situation by recognizing as full Christian marriage the union of a Christian woman with one of her male Christian slaves, provided she consorted with him alone.<sup>22</sup> This is reverse of the relationship mentioned above in the Apostolic Tradition and gives further evidence of the church's concern for the welfare and integrity of its women.

Finally, we note the absence of any mention of deaconesses in this work. Even in the canons concerning baptism and although anointings are mentioned, nothing is said of the ministration of women in these anointings even when women were the ones being baptized.

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<sup>20</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Ad Uxorem, II, 8.

<sup>22</sup> Hippolytus, Refutation of All Heresies, Book IX, especially chapter VII.

## II. THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH ORDER

This second Church Order bears in Greek the title "The Constitutions by the hand of Clement and the Ecclesiastical Canons of the Holy Apostles." The first half of it contains the "Two Ways" the same as the first portion of the Didaché, and the second half embodies an early manual of church discipline. On the editing of this writing Harnack says:

. . . it may be considered rash to place the time of the editing earlier than the third century. We may not, however, put it later than the middle of the fourth century, as from this time uniform church ordinances were fixed. In fact the whole undertaking is more easily understood if we date it in the second half of the third century, say about the year 300, rather than later. With regard to the place where the editing was done, the history of the book points to Egypt.<sup>23</sup>

The sources (two according to Harnack) which this editor used, however, are considerably older. He places them as early as the year 200<sup>24</sup> which means, of course, that the regulations contained therein are of this period. To the question, how much editing of these sources has been done, Harnack answers:

The work of the editor on this law-book, measured quantitatively, has been exceedingly small. He has, apart from the introduction arranged his sources very unskilfully, and contented himself with little additions and cancellings. Thus it is explained how it was

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<sup>23</sup> Adolf Harnack, Sources of the Apostolic Canons (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1895), pp. 5-6.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 52-53.

possible that experts have referred the whole book in its present form to the second century.<sup>25</sup>

Thus we have a very early and therefore interesting source though it could hardly be called a monument in the early Church or a document which arose from one of the chief churches.

The first outstanding feature of this Church Order which is relevant to the subject is the strain of asceticism in it. It is suggested in listing the bishop's qualifications that it would be good if he were unmarried. If not unmarried, then a man of one wife (ἀπὸ μιᾶς γυναίκας).<sup>26</sup> Presbyters, however, are to abstain from all sexual relations.<sup>27</sup> This inclination to celibacy might be traced to Montanist influence for it would be very difficult to tell how much influence, if secret, this sect had upon the church. This coupled with the fact that in this work St. John takes first place would draw one toward the conclusion, as supported by Wordsworth<sup>28</sup> and Bartlet,<sup>29</sup> that some part of Asia Minor was the original area of the sources.

The second outstanding feature of the treatise concerns widows.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>26</sup> Chapter 16.

<sup>27</sup> Chapter 17.

<sup>28</sup> Wordsworth, op. cit., p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> Bartlet, op. cit., p. 123.

Section twenty-one says:

Three widows shall be appointed, two to persevere in prayer for all those who are in temptation, and for the reception of revelations where such are necessary, but one to assist the women visited with sicknesses, she must be ready for service [εὐδίακονος], discreet, communicating what is necessary to the presbyters, not avaricious, not given to much love of wine, so that she may be sober and capable of performing the night services [ὕπηρεσίας], and other loving service if she will; for these are the chief good treasures of the Lord.

Bartlet has pointed out that this Church Order belongs to a region where the Church was largely in a missionary stage. This would seem to be indicated by the opening words of the second half of the document where a group of less than twelve men are in question. If this be true, then

it is altogether probable . . . that the Church-order here sketched, in the first instance, should present only the simplest and most general outlines, and so would seem to stand in need of supplementation--before the close of the third century. But the work becomes the more interesting in this light, as directing our attention to the things felt to be most essential . . . which determined first the original forms and then the changes made in them.<sup>30</sup>

But, since Harnack has shown that in the list of those who make up the organization of the Church only the numbers in each group, not the number of groups, have been changed by the editor, then it arrests our interest that widows appear in a list which includes bishops, presbyters, readers, and deacons. The ministry of women was evidently felt to be a real need in a newly-organized assembly. This would be without any

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-3.

special significance if these widows were simply designated to be intercessors for the congregation. This function appeared early and has appeared often in the literature. That widows should be nurses of sick women is not surprising either. But what is surprising and new is, first, that widows are expected to receive revelations, and, second, that there is a division of responsibility among them, two being appointed for intercession, and one to nursing. The idea that the intercessory widows would receive revelations surely reflects Montanist influence though it may also be a natural counterpart of their responsibility in prayer (cf. Acts 13:2). It may be that these revelations were "in relation to the necessities of the members of the congregation," but it is equally true that "a charisma of the widows is of course presupposed."<sup>31</sup>

But it is the division of labor among the widows which is most intriguing especially in the light of another passage which reads:

It is profitable to order a service [διακονίαν] for the women. Peter said: We have already given orders; but concerning the offering of the Body and of the Blood let us make quite clear. John said: Ye have forgotten, brethren, that when the Teacher asked for the Bread and the Cup, and blessed them saying, This is my Body and Blood, He suffered not these women to stand along with us. (Martha said: Because of Mary, for He saw her smiling. Mary said: I did not laugh any more.) For he said to us before, when he was teaching, that the weak should be saved by the strong. . . . It is not proper for the women to pray standing, but, sitting on the ground. How then can we, concerning women, order them services, unless that of coming to the help of necessitous women?<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Harnack, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Chapters 27, 28.



The extraordinary thing about this passage in relation to the division of labor among the widows is that while restrictions are definitely placed on the public ministry of women and anything like a formal diaconate is denied them, still the nursing widow is assigned responsibilities which correspond to those later assigned to deaconesses. Evidently the ministry of women and their official status was in a state of flux or perhaps even in controversy in the period when this Order was written, but it appears we stand in the vestibule of an organization which will include deaconesses in the professional sense.

The three reasons assigned for limiting the activity of women command attention. Two of them are unique. The incident of Mary's laughing seems to suggest that a woman's less self-controlled emotional nature is a reason for her not sharing at least in ministering the Eucharist. The other singular argument is that women should not be allowed to perform deacon's services since it becomes women to pray sitting and in such services they would have to stand. Nowhere else do we meet either of these reasons. The third is the familiar reason concerning woman's being the weaker vessel and dependent therefore upon the man. Thus the only ecclesiastical service that can be entrusted to a woman is the nursing of fellow women needing help.

### III. THE SYRIAC DIDASCALIA

The third Church Order which belongs to the period under discussion is the so-called Didascalia. It is the most important of the

documents which can be classed as bodies of instruction in church life, for as no other ancient Christian writing, it gives detailed information concerning the life of the ancient Christian community. The document has survived completely only in a Syriac translation though considerable portions are to be found in a Latin version. The Greek original has never been discovered, but considerable portions of it are imbedded in the first six books of the Apostolic Constitutions; however,

the compiler of that work dealt so freely with his source, making perpetual additions, omissions, and alterations, that we can seldom feel sure that he has left a sentence exactly as he found it; and of course we could not know what he had taken from his source in any form, or even what that source might be, without an independent knowledge of the Didascalia itself.<sup>33</sup>

The verdict of Hans Achelis, who has written one of the fullest studies of the Didascalia,<sup>34</sup> concerning the date of the document is non liquet. Connolly, who has written the comprehensive English work on the subject, places its date of writing in the first part of the third century. He declares: "Yet my own inclination is to place the Didascalia earlier rather than later: or, if that is too vague, before the Decian persecution rather than after the grant of toleration by

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<sup>33</sup> R. Hugh Connolly, Didascalia Apostolorum (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1929), p. v.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Achelis und Johs. Flemming, Die syrische Didaskalia (Texte und Untersuchungen, N.F. X 2, Leipzig, 1904).

Gallienus."<sup>35</sup> Both authorities agree in locating its place of composition as being between Antioch and Edessa.<sup>36</sup>

The character of the writing as compared with the other Church Orders is best described by Connolly in these words:

In its aims, however, and in the character of its contents it stands apart from most of the other documents of this class, for it deals hardly at all with formal legislation. . . . While the author does not come before us here as a theologian in the strict sense of the term, neither does he appear in any sense as a canonist, or one who formulates ecclesiastical rules on the basis of custom or tradition. His interest is engaged with other matters, with personal conduct, and with ecclesiastical discipline only in its wider aspect, as it affects the daily life of the community at large. . . . The matter of his discourse provides variety, and his handling of the many topics that present themselves has about it a directness and force which suggests that behind it all there is life and reality.<sup>37</sup>

Seen in this light, the Didascalia assumes the greatest relevance to actual conditions of its time. "How relevant it was felt to be to actual conditions one may already judge from its apology for the severity of its criticisms of the heresies it deals with"<sup>38</sup> (cf. Chapter 26, pp. 256-59 (VI, 23)). Because it is primarily concerned with Christian living as a whole and because it consequently relates every institutional element to that life in a vital way, this document stands

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<sup>35</sup> Connolly, op. cit., p. xci.

<sup>36</sup> Achelis, op. cit., p. 370; Connolly, op. cit., p. lxxxix.

<sup>37</sup> Connolly, op. cit., p. xxvii.

<sup>38</sup> Bartlet, op. cit., p. 90.

alone in its class as a faithful portrayal of church life in the third century.

Women and marriage and the home. There is no hint of preference being given to the ascetic or monastic life in the Didascalia. In speaking of the followers of Simon's heresy, the writer mentions and condemns in the mere mentioning that "many of them taught that a man should not marry, saying that if one did not marry, this was holiness."<sup>39</sup> There is no argument, for it seems to be taken for granted in the writer's mind that any idea that the celibate life is to be preferred would never enter the thinking of orthodox Christians. When, in another place, he is giving instructions to parents he specially directs that Christian parents

be careful to take wives for them [i.e., their children], and have them married when their time is come, lest in their early age by the ardour of youth they commit fornication like the heathen, and you have to render an account to the Lord God in the day of judgment.<sup>40</sup>

Children are expected to be a part of a Christian home and indeed of the ministry of Christians. This is seen in what the writer has to say about rearing orphans.

Now if any one of the children of Christians be an orphan, whether boy or girl, it is well that, if there be one of the brethren who has no children, he should adopt the child in the place of

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<sup>39</sup> Didascalia, Chapter 23, p. 202 (VI, 10). The reference in parentheses is to Funk's edition; the Chapter and page number to Conolly's.

<sup>40</sup> Chapter 22, p. 194 (IV, 11).

children. And whoever has a son, let him adopt a girl; and when her time is come, let him give her to him to wife, that his work may be completed in the ministry of God.<sup>41</sup>

Special instructions along this line are given concerning a bishop, for it was directed that he must have had a wife and raised children.<sup>42</sup>

In speaking of the husband's responsibility in marriage, the author says:

Let not a man despise or condemn his wife, nor be lifted up against her; but let him be merciful, and let his hand be open to give. And let him please his wife alone, and cherish her with honour; and let him study to be loved by her alone, and by none other.<sup>43</sup>

One would gather from a comparison of the words here with the almost incidental mention (as given above) of those heretics who taught celibacy that there was more danger to the Christian home from the teachings of heathens without the church than from the teachings of celibates from within. Instructions to wives include the ever-present word about subjection and a word about home duties.

And let a woman also be subject to her husband; because the head of the woman is the man, and the head of a man that walks in the way of justice is Christ. . . . Woman, fear thy husband and reverence him, and please him alone, and be ready to minister to him; and let thy hands be put forth to the wool, and thy mind be upon the spindle [here follow the words of Prov. 31:10-31].<sup>44</sup>

Her responsibility in the home is not only toward her husband but also

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<sup>41</sup> Chapter 17, p. 152 (IV, 1).

<sup>42</sup> Chapter 4, p. 32 (II, 1).

<sup>43</sup> Chapter 2, p. 8 (I, 3).

<sup>44</sup> Chapter 3, pp. 21-22 (I, 8).

toward her children, for the instructions concerning children are given to parents together.<sup>45</sup>

In these regulations pertaining to marriage and the home, two things are striking. One is the insistence, repeated here as in so many other writings of this whole period, on the headship of man. The other, peculiar to this writing, is the marked Jewish coloring of these instructions. This Jewish element appears throughout the document,<sup>46</sup> but in this realm it serves to remind us once again of the dependence of Christianity on Judaism in matters relating to the status of women in the home.

Women and the church. Of woman's place in the official life of the Church this document has much to say. However, it does not say anything at all concerning virginity, as noted above, or concerning an order of virgins. This is in marked contrast with western thought as witnessed in the Church Order of Hippolytus and the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian. Of widows, however, there is much mention, as has been the case throughout this period. The account of them in the Didascalia has been summarized thus:

The widows were a numerous and somewhat troublesome body of Church pensioners. Among their besetting sins were grumbling at their fellow-widows who happened to receive larger doles, and making begging expeditions instead of being content with the supplies that

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<sup>45</sup> Chapter 22, p. 193 (IV, 11).

<sup>46</sup> Bartlet, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

reached them in the normal way. They had to be reminded that "the Altar of God does not go running about, but is fixed in one place."<sup>47</sup>

Connolly adds: "Widows of this sort are summed up by our author in two words with a Greek pun: they are not  $\chi\eta\rho\alpha\iota$  but  $\pi\eta\rho\alpha\iota$ , not 'widows' but 'wallets.'"<sup>48</sup>

Widows were divided into two classes--those who were enrolled in an order and those who were not. Evidently the only qualification for being enrolled was age, and that was ten years younger than the same qualification laid down in the Pastoral Epistles. The Didascalia says:

Appoint as a widow one that is not under fifty years old, who in some sort, by reason of her years, shall be remote from the suspicion of taking a second husband. . . . But let not young widows be appointed to the widows' order: yet let them be taken care of and helped, lest by reason of their being in want they be minded to marry a second time, and some harmful matter ensue. For this you know, that she who marries one husband may lawfully marry also a second; but she who goes beyond this is a harlot.<sup>49</sup>

Both groups, however, were to receive support from the church.<sup>50</sup> The procedure is clearly defined. Donors did not give directly to widows but rather to the bishop who distributed gifts to the widows at his discretion. On receiving an alms from the bishop, the widow was told

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<sup>47</sup> Robinson, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>48</sup> Connolly, op. cit., p. xliii.

<sup>49</sup> Chapter 14, pp. 130-31 (III, 1).

<sup>50</sup> Loc. cit.



the name of the giver in order to pray for him.<sup>51</sup> Besides praying for benefactors and for the whole Church, widows were to make garments at home in order to provide for those in distress.<sup>52</sup> Further, they were to fast and pray for sick and distressed Church members; they were to visit them, and, what is most remarkable, they were to lay their hands on them.<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand, certain ministries were forbidden to widows and all women because they were women. The first was baptism.

That a woman should baptize, or that one should be baptized by a woman, we do not counsel, for it is a transgression of the commandment, and a great peril to her who baptizes and to him who is baptized. For if it were lawful to be baptized by a woman, our Lord and Teacher Himself would have been baptized by Mary His mother, whereas He was baptized by John, like others of the people. Do not therefore imperil yourselves, brethren and sisters, by acting beside the law of the Gospel.<sup>54</sup>

The second was teaching.

It is neither right nor necessary therefore that women should be teachers, and especially concerning the name of Christ and the redemption of His passion. For you have not been appointed to this, O women, and especially widows, that you should teach but that you should pray and entreat the Lord God. For He the Lord God, Jesus Christ our Teacher, sent us the Twelve to instruct the People and the Gentiles; and there were with us women disciples, Mary Magdalene and Mary the daughter of James and the other Mary; but He did not send them to instruct the people with us. For if it were

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<sup>51</sup> Chapter 9, p. 88 (II, 27) and chapter 14, p. 131 (III, 3).

<sup>52</sup> Chapter 15, p. 138 (III, 7).

<sup>53</sup> Chapter 15, p. 140 (III, 8).

<sup>54</sup> Chapter 15, p. 142 (III, 9).

required that women should teach, our Master Himself would have commanded these to give instruction with us.<sup>55</sup>

In both instances the reasons for forbidding these ministries to women were found in our Lord's example rather than in St. Paul's.

Slight references to deaconesses have been noticed in Pliny, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, but the Syrian Didascalia furnishes the first and only major reference to them in all the extra-canonical literature of the Ante-Nicene period. In an analogy between the Christian ministry and the Trinity, the deaconess is likened to the Holy Spirit.

. . . for the bishop sits for you in the place of God Almighty. But the deacon stands in the place of Christ; and do you love him. And the deaconess shall be honoured by you in the place of the Holy Spirit; and the presbyters shall be to you in the likeness of the Apostles; and the orphans and widows shall be reckoned by you in the likeness of the altar.<sup>56</sup>

It may be that the source of the metaphor is to be found in the Epistles of Ignatius<sup>57</sup> or it may simply be, as Connolly suggests, "an indication of the oriental associations of the Didascalia, since 'spirit' in Semitic languages is feminine."<sup>58</sup> The words used in the corresponding passage in the Apostolic Constitutions which probably represent the

<sup>55</sup> Chapter 15, p. 133 (III, 6).

<sup>56</sup> Chapter 9, p. 88 (II, 26).

<sup>57</sup> To the Magnesians, 6; To the Trallians, 3; To the Smyrnaeans, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Connolly, op. cit., p. xliii.

Greek original of the Didascalia are ὁ διάκονος. There can be little doubt that this third century writer had a lofty conception of the female diaconate.<sup>59</sup>

It is the appointment and duties of deaconesses that is unique to this writing and of most interest.

Wherefore, O bishop, appoint thee workers of righteousness as helpers who may co-operate with thee unto salvation. Those that please thee out of all the people thou shalt choose and appoint as deacons: a man for the performance of the most things that are required, but a woman for the ministry of women. For there are houses whither thou canst not send a deacon to the women, on account of the heathen, but mayest send a deaconess. Also, because in many other matters the office of a woman deacon is required. In the first place, when women go down into the water, those who go down into the water ought to be anointed by a deaconess with the oil of anointing; and where there is no woman at hand, and especially no deaconess, he who baptizes must of necessity anoint her who is being baptized. But where there is a woman, and especially a deaconess, it is not fitting that women should be seen by men: but with the imposition of hand do thou anoint the head only. As of old the priests and kings were anointed in Israel, do thou in like manner, with the imposition of hand, anoint the head of those who receive baptism, whether of men or of women; and afterwards--whether thou thyself baptize, or thou command the deacons or presbyters to baptize--let a woman deacon, as we have already said, anoint the women. But let a man pronounce over them the invocation of the divine Names in the water.

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<sup>59</sup> Robinson (op. cit., pp. 65-68) attempts to show from a comparison of this passage with the corresponding one in the Apostolic Constitutions (II, 25) that the importance of the deaconess had dropped in the fourth century, the time of composition of the latter work. This may be so, and his argument is based on (1) the assumption that the analogy is clearly based on Ignatius; (2) the inference that the addition of other church officers in the Constitutions implies the decrease in importance of each; and (3) the fact that in the Constitutions readers, singers, and doorkeepers are listed in one instance before deaconesses, widows, virgins, and orphans. However, when the list is elaborated it is precisely in the same order as in the Didascalia. In the elaboration readers, singers, and doorkeepers drop out; only virgins are added.

And when she who is being baptized has come up from the water, let the deaconess receive her, and teach and instruct her how the seal of baptism ought to be kept unbroken in purity and holiness. For this cause we say that the ministry of a woman deacon is especially needful and important. For our Lord and Saviour also was ministered unto by women ministers, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the daughter of James and mother of Jose, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, with other women beside. And thou also hast need of the ministry of a deaconess for many things; for a deaconess is required to go into the houses of the heathen where there are believing women, and to visit those who are sick, and to minister to them in that of which they have need, and to bathe those who have begun to recover from sickness.<sup>60</sup>

The necessity for deaconesses and their ministry is quite clear from the passage. We need only make three observations.

(1) Even deaconesses come under the earlier prohibition to women concerning baptizing. The actual performance of the rite is to be done by men. The prohibition against teaching, however, is modified at least to the extent that deaconesses should teach other women the responsibilities of the Christian life.

(2) The ministration of women is based upon the similiar ministry of women during the life of Christ.

(3) Robinson quite correctly points out in this instance that in the corresponding passage in the Apostolic Constitutions (III, 15) there has been a definite decrease in the status of the deaconess. For one thing her ministry in cases of illness practically disappears in the fourth-century document. For another thing, in the latter work she is definitely subordinated and dependent upon the deacon in her

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<sup>60</sup> Chapter 16, pp. 146-48 (III, 12).

responsibilities.<sup>61</sup> Other observations do not seem necessary in the light of the straightforwardness of this section. Neither are there other relevant passages in the Didascalia that bear on the status of women.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

From the consideration of these three Church Orders belonging to the third century and representing Christian life both in the east and west we may draw certain conclusions. Without question these documents confirm a previously cited observation that in the Ante-Nicene period the most prominent group as far as women in the Church are concerned is the widows. The ministry of prayer was universally assigned to them. In addition they were delegated certain ministries in relation to the sick. There were clearly widows who are enrolled in an order and those who were not. Support came regularly from the Church. No liturgical ministry was allowed the widows.

Virgins were a relatively minor group in these Church Orders. They were certainly not in any sense an order nor was there any special merit ascribed to the state of virginity.

It is, however, the detailed word concerning deaconesses in the Didascalia which is the most extraordinary feature of these writings. They appear as a well-established and well-recognized group with

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<sup>61</sup> Robinson, op. cit., p. 71.

specific ministries to perform in the Church. It is true that the ministries were confined to women (in assisting with baptism and in sickness primarily) and that no sort of liturgical ministry was allowed them. Nevertheless, it was a well-defined and admittedly necessary ministry. Up to this point in the literature of this period there have only been slight and relatively insignificant references to deaconesses. Suddenly, however, in the Didascalia they appear as a well-developed and well-recognized group. The burning question is, of course, How does one account for the silence of these years? Cecilia Robinson, keenly aware of the importance of this question in relation to her thesis, deals with it in this way:

This silence may be due in part to the fact that the locality to which we should look with most expectation of finding evidence is Palestine and Syria, and for that locality we are specially poor in documents during the period in question. The great writers, Irenaeus and Tertullian, Clement and Origen, belong to Churches in which we have no evidence at all, or none until a much later date, of the existence of the Institution. But the silence of Ignatius and Polycarp is remarkable, and brings us face to face with a real difficulty, which admits of two explanations. Either (1) there was no continuous existence of the female diaconate in the strict sense, but in the third century the needs of the Church called for a revival of the office, and justified that revival by the words of S. Paul's Epistles. Or (2) the Order was in fact continuously in existence, though no occasion occurred to refer to it in the scanty literature which has survived from the locality to which we naturally look in our search for evidence.<sup>62</sup>

Miss Robinson's second alternative answer to the problem appears weak, for even though there is little literature from Syria and

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<sup>62</sup> Cecilia Robinson, The Ministry of Deaconesses, pp. 83-84.



Palestine during the period of silence in relation to deaconesses, still there is abundant literature from other parts of the Christian world all without reference to deaconesses. In other words, the silence from the lack of Syrian literature in the second century is not nearly so significant as the silence in the literature which we do have.

The same author's other suggestion is more commendable. It, however, implies strongly and practically assumes that deaconesses in the third century had the same functions as in New Testament times. One feels that this is reading back into the New Testament much of the development which had clearly taken place in the office and ministry of deaconesses as they appear in the Church Orders. Rather than the word "revival" one would suggest the word "development"--a development of something which has its roots in the New Testament, but which was based not as Miss Robinson says on the words of Paul so much as on the example of women's ministry to Jesus.

If this truly be a development, is it possible to trace any intermediate steps between the more simple picture in the New Testament of women's ministry and the well-developed picture in the Didascalia of the female diaconate? This is a very difficult question for the evidence is scanty, but one ventures to suggest the following. It will be recalled that the Apostolic Church Order divided praying widows from nursing widows. Further, the Didascalia assigned to deaconesses a similar ministry to that of the nursing widows of the Apostolic Church



Order. The Didascalia stated that widows also had nursing duties. In other words, part of the ministry of deaconesses overlaps that of the widows. Possibly then, that intermediate step between the New Testament and the Didascalia was simply this: as the order of widows grew in numbers and importance the ministry of widows began to expand from that of intercession to include that of ministering to the sick. The usefulness and advisability of this impressed the Church and its leaders until at length certain widows were definitely set aside for this service. Such a widow would naturally be called ἡ διάκονος. It is not difficult to see how other duties would have been added to her ministry in time. This explanation takes into account the overlapping of duties between the widow and deaconess in the Didascalia and the division of duties among the widows in the Apostolic Church Order. One additional piece of evidence seems to show that this suggestion is at least along the right line. The fourth century Apostolic Constitutions say: "But let a Deaconess be a pure virgin; but if not, then a widow once married, faithful and honourable."<sup>63</sup> This would indicate that deaconesses at that time were chosen from one of the recognized groups in the Church and would not contradict the idea that earlier they were chosen from the order of widows.

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<sup>63</sup> VI, 17.

## CHAPTER XIV

### CONCLUSIONS

To summarize and systematize the foregoing facts is our final task and the purpose of this chapter. There are certain gaps in the evidence which one would wish filled; nevertheless, the guiding principle now as in all this work is simply to state the facts objectively and to make any suggestions that can be made on the basis of those facts.

With regard to women, Christianity's inheritance from ancient Greece and Rome was small. In Greece, with the exception of Macedonia, women were definitely considered as inferiors and were kept in utter seclusion in the family. Stranger women, of course, had liberty, but the price of that liberty was harlotry. Legally, the Roman matron was little better off, but practically she had much more freedom. This freedom brought the undesirable result of widespread moral laxity; yet it prepared the way for the freedom of activity of Christian women in the early days of the spread of Christianity throughout the Empire. There is no doubt that when the Christian message came with its insistence on absolute purity it brought protection and elevation of the status of women. Although it is very true that in many respects the Christian Church worked its leaven within the framework of existing conditions, in respect to the standards of purity expected in its

women, "specifically Christian motives and sanctions are introduced."<sup>1</sup> The Apologists are persistent in their use of the higher standards of Christianity toward women as an apologetic for the truth of the Christian message, and their very insistence underlines the uniqueness of this feature of the Christian message.

The purity of the marriage relationship was the most important aspect of this higher standard. In a Christian civilization of the twentieth century it is easy to overlook how startling and important this was. Indeed, "the holiness of marriage was one of the foremost moral principles of Christianity."<sup>2</sup> Two distinctively Christian teachings contributed largely to this principle. One was Jesus' teaching concerning divorce, and the other was the sacramental conception of marriage of which St. Paul spoke. Both of these are exclusively Christian contributions, and bear testimony that in the realm of ethics Christianity brought something new to elevate the status of women. At least it is true to say that Christian teaching follows Old Testament principles, for, although polygamy, for instance, is succeeded by monogamy and divorce by the disallowance of it, still "the general tendency of the Old Testament, in regard to the position of women, is in

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<sup>1</sup> C. H. Dodd, Gospel and Law (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1951), p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> Dobschütz, op. cit., p. 349.

the right direction."<sup>3</sup> However, the idea of subordination of the woman to her husband is prominent in Judaism and carries over with little change into the teaching of the Church throughout the entire period under consideration. One feels that this may be traced to the fact that the Church continually based the teaching of subordination on the Jewish conception of creation and the fall of man, and because these stories in the minds of Christian writers contained inalterable truths, it was not anticipated that the idea of subordination of women was to be replaced by any kind of emancipation. Consequently, the sphere of activity of women in the home as the subordinate helpmeet yet co-ruler of the children carries over into the teaching of the early Church.

In other respects, however, Christianity definitely surpassed the teaching of Judaism. One of these concerned divorce. It was shown that both Jesus and Paul taught that divorce had no place in the ideal Christian ethic, which teaching was superior to the best standards of the day found in Judaism. By whatever method Jesus' words are interpreted, the result is the same, and this disallowance of divorce was a distinct contribution of Christianity to the elevation of the status of women. The other respect in which the teachings of the Christian faith surpassed the trend of the Old Testament concerned the place of women in religious life. In Judaism, women were partakers of the covenant relation; in Christianity they are one with men in Christ Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Goudge, The Place of Women in the Church, p. 34.

Though women were mentioned in the religious life of Israel, it was always in a very secondary way, and they certainly never played a part similar to that which Christian women played in the early life of the Church. One important reason for this is simply that the unmarried Jewish woman was a reproach, while Christianity offered to the unmarried woman a sanctified service, and some of its teaching even encouraged celibacy. Again, as in the matter of divorce, it is Jesus who introduced this wider service for women by accepting the ministry of a number of women during His earthly life. Thus, it may rightly be said that Jesus was the turning point in the history of women, for it was He who insisted on protecting the sanctity of their personal lives and promoting the activity of their religious lives.

Although Jesus clearly opened the doors of religious service to women by offering the first widows who served Him something to do beside seeking remarriage, what particular form and development this service took in the life of the Church during the first three centuries has not been so clearly and easily traceable. However, certain conclusions have been made and the over-all picture, though lacking some details, can be drawn.

That women had a large place in the life of the Church in the first three centuries is beyond question. It was quite natural that Jesus' lead in accepting the service of women should be followed by the Church. In the early days of expansion women ministered of their substance, hospitality, time, and labors in a significant and important

way. Nevertheless, it was not a leading role which they played, for that belonged to the men. As was shown, early converts to Christianity included many women. At the very end of the period under consideration the same is true, for in the persecution of Licinius (307 A. D.) it was decreed that (1) men and women were not to worship together; (2) women were never to enter places of worship; and (3) women were to be taught religion by women only, instead of by bishops.<sup>4</sup> Concerning these regulations Harnack observes:

The reasons for these orders . . . remain obscure. Concern for feminine morality cannot have been anything but a pretext. But what, then, it may be asked, was their real motive? Are we at liberty to infer from the decree that the emperor considered the stronghold of Christianity lay in women?<sup>5</sup>

Women were active not only at the beginning and end of our period but throughout it as well, for the very amount of material written concerning them witnesses to this fact. The regulations in the writings of Paul, the Pastorals, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, and Cyprian indicate that women were definitely active in the life of the church throughout this period. The Old Testament, for instance, contains no chapters similar to 1 Corinthians 11 or 14.

The moving force behind this activity was the Founder Himself. The reproach of the unmarried and widowed in Judaism could be turned into repute in the service of the Master. The secondary force in

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<sup>4</sup> Eusebius, Life of Constantine, I, liii.

<sup>5</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 81.

promoting the activity of women throughout this period was the developing strain of asceticism, which interacted as it developed with the increasing ministry of women. The belief in the immediate second advent was an important contributing cause, though it has justly been observed that:

As an actual direct originating influence upon monastic asceticism it had little value; but when in its ascendant [sic] it undoubtedly exercised a real force in contributing to the ascetic bias in the conception of Christian life which was so prevalent in the early centuries.<sup>6</sup>

Another contributing cause which the same author suggests was "the universal conviction that men were surrounded by Spirits of Evil."<sup>7</sup> Renunciation and ascetic standards became the weapons used to fight the diabolic lures of the world. Doubtless, too, the increasing prominence given to widows throughout our period gave impetus to an ascetic life among the younger women, so that by the time of Cyprian there were a large, though unorganized, number of virgins in the Church.

Closely akin to the rise of asceticism is the evidence concerning virgins. The first mention of them was in St. Paul's word to them as preserved in 1 Corinthians 7. Though he clearly approves of the marriage of virgins, he indicates that it is preferable to his way of thinking that they remain unmarried. At the beginning of the second

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<sup>6</sup> John Richard Mackenzie Forbes, "Rise and Earliest Development of Christian Monasticism," (unpublished Doctor's thesis, The University of Edinburgh, 1928), p. 212.

<sup>7</sup> Loc. cit.



century Polycarp directed that virgins' vows of chastity should be known only to the bishop. A hundred years later Tertullian, who definitely gives preference to the celibate life, is nonetheless insisting on the maintenance of the private character of virgins' vows. Suddenly, however, in the writings of Cyprian virgins appear as a large and respected group in the Church. It has been shown that they were not yet an order though all the elements which would make up an order are present by the end of the third century. It is true to say, in addition, that though the order of virgins is a primitive institution it is also primarily a western one at least in the period covered by this investigation. Furthermore, there is no confusion between the virgin and widow throughout the period.

This ascetic spirit and the rise of virgins had an exalting effect on the status of women, for the unmarried woman was honored as a servant of the Lord. The position and designations which Cyprian gives to them all point to this conclusion. Asceticism itself gave dignity to women when coupled with the privilege of service which Christianity introduced, and the rise of virgins so that they began to be a separate and distinguishable group in the Church in the time of Cyprian obviously exalted the position of women in the Church. It should be reiterated that though virgins are more prominent in the West still they are not an order and did not have specially designated functions. It has rightly been said that:

We must never forget that Christian asceticism has generally tended toward the equalisation of the sexes. The historical opposite to

the ascetic ideal was not that in which woman was looked upon as the equal complement of man, but one in which woman was looked upon as the divinely ordained household drudge or the plaything of man.<sup>8</sup>

In relation to the public ministry of women, it was seen that although the prophecy connected with Pentecost included the promise of women prophesying, evidently this was not fulfilled in the public ministry of the church. The general practice of the churches was that women should keep silent in the church, and this practice continued throughout the period. Although the right of women to prophecy in private was exercised (cf. the cases of Philip's daughters and Priscilla), it was excluded from the public gatherings of the church. Even in Montanism the visions that one woman had were reported to the male leaders of the church after the conclusion of the service. References to itinerant prophets in the literature is always to male ones. Thus the direction and exercise of public worship was in the hands of men.

This does not mean, of course, that women had no responsibility in the life of the Church. Something of the extent of their activities in the expansion of the church has already been reviewed. It now remains to summarize what has been discovered about their position in the official life of the Christian community.

Beyond all question it was the widow who was the outstanding figure in this regard throughout the entire first three centuries.

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<sup>8</sup> F. Crawford Burkitt, The Gospel History and Its Transmission, pp. 214-15.

Although a Jewish widow sought remarriage, the degeneration of the use of the leviratus meant that she received support from a temple fund. The young Christian community could do no less for the widows whom it numbered among its converts. However, Christianity did more than Judaism by offering to its widows who resolved not to remarry the opportunity of consecrated spiritual service. "This state of widowhood was new."<sup>9</sup> What services they may have performed for the Church in its earliest days is unknown, for it is not impossible to conceive of their being active in the same manner as were the women who ministered to Jesus. However, lest one assume too much it must be remembered that the emphasis in the early regulations concerning widows is on the "service which the Church is to render to them, not on that which they are to render to the Church."<sup>10</sup> Ignatius speaks of their dedicated character, while Polycarp is the first to give definite indication of their ministry which was that of intercession. At about the same time, the regulations of the Pastorals show that there was in the early part of the second century an order of widows whose support was officially assumed by the Church. It was suggested that although official duties were not part of the official enrolling, nevertheless widows in Ephesus were expected to minister in prayer and possibly to rear orphan

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Viteau, "L'Institution des Diares et des Veuves," Revue d'Histoire Ecclesiastique, XXII (1926), 530.

<sup>10</sup> Cuthbert H. Turner, "Ministries of Women in the Primitive Church," The Constructive Quarterly (London: Oxford University Press, Vol. 7, No. 3, Sept. 1919), p. 436.

children as part of their service to the Church. Harnack also suggested that possibly they had to do with the collecting of funds for the Church. At any rate it would be unwise to insist that their only function was that of prayer. One sees no reason why it would be wrong to speak, as Viteau does,<sup>11</sup> of a diaconate of widows in the early church. But whatever the actual service of widows in these early days might have been, it is important to emphasize that the very drawing up of ecclesiastical regulations for women in this early period "was quite a unique creation of the church,"<sup>12</sup> for it demonstrates again that the status of women was elevated and sanctified by the Church.

It was intimated above that in the first and early part of the second century widows may have performed various duties for the Church not because they were officially commissioned to do so but simply as a part of their ministry as women. However, as the order becomes more clearly established any ministry except that of prayer ceases to be mentioned. Thus in Rome, according to the Apostolic Tradition, widows had no active ministry in the first part of the third century. This is confirmed by the letter of Pope Cornelius in the middle of that century. In other words, whatever ministry widows may have had in the very beginning was exercised not because they were widows but because they were women. As the order developed and became defined it was not

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<sup>11</sup> Viteau, loc. cit.

<sup>12</sup> Harnack, op. cit., II, 72.

primarily for the purpose that widows might become an order of ministry but the object of ministry. One outstanding exception appears, however, to this generalization, and that is in the Egyptian church where, as witnessed by the Apostolic Church Order in the third century, there is mention of a division among the widows into those who ministered in prayer and those who ministered in sickness and visitation. (A suggestion as to what this might indicate will be made below.) The widow, then, is the most outstanding and universally recognized of women in the life of the Church during the first three centuries.

The origin and development of the office of deaconess is a more difficult question because of the scantiness of the evidence. The need for women workers was clearly seen, and there can be no doubt that women served as deaconesses (using the word in its general sense) in the early Church. Phoebe, the only woman actually called a *διάκονος* in the New Testament, must have exercised some leadership in the church at Cenchrea though it was thought inadvisable to conclude that this was anything more than acting as a patroness. That she proves the existence of an official female diaconate could not be substantiated. Even Miss Robinson, who would, if anything, be prone to want Phoebe to prove the existence of deaconesses, declares of the use of *διάκονος* in her case: "We are, however, hardly justified in assuming that S. Paul uses the word here in a strictly official sense."<sup>13</sup> With that conclusion

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<sup>13</sup> Robinson, op. cit., p. 10.

one can only agree. It seemed also difficult to assume that the mention of the women in 1 Timothy 3:11 clearly refers to deaconesses in the official sense. One felt, rather, that the reference was to deacons' wives, yet it does bear evidence to the fact that women did assist in the ministry of the Church especially in visitation. It could hardly be more than such a ministry since to deacons themselves was not committed the spiritual ministry this early. Neither does the evidence of Pliny's letter warrant the conclusion that deaconesses were an official order in the Church in either the first or second century.

However, in the third century document, the Didascalia, deaconesses appear as a well-established and well-recognized group in the Church with specific ministries, though liturgical ministries were not included among them. Their principal duties were helping at baptisms and visiting the sick. The justification for their ministry is based upon the fact that women ministered to Jesus during His life, but the document does not suggest that the type of ministry was necessarily the same. In other words, one is not warranted from the Didascalia to read back into the New Testament the development which had clearly taken place by the third century in the office of deaconess.

What, then, does the silence of the first two centuries and the development of the third century with regard to deaconesses mean? One would suggest this. Though the ministry of women was limited in its scope, it was not limited in the early days of the church to any particular group of women. There were doubtless widows among the group who

ministered to Jesus. Phoebe herself may have been a widow. Perhaps the younger widows who went from house to house<sup>14</sup> did so in the discharge of some duty for the church. In Ephesus, deacons' wives helped their husbands in their duties which were chiefly in the realm of the physical and material rather than the spiritual. 1 Corinthians 7 certainly indicates that virgins served the Lord too, and the activity of any of these persons could have been called 'deaconing.' As time went on, though there was never confusion between the groups, the particular distinctiveness of widows, virgins, and deaconesses developed. Virgins became prominent in the west; widows appeared everywhere; while deaconesses appeared as a well-developed group in the east, but a group whose development seems to come in a broken and indirect line from the early Church. Why is this so? Possibly it is because as the other groups of women developed distinctiveness there was a gap left in the performance of certain ministries. The large and respected group of virgins in the west had no particular ministry assigned to them. Widows were particularly limited to the ministry of intercession as time went on, and likely the defining of the order further limited their ministry. Who, then, would do the visitation and relief which both virgins, widows, and deacons' wives evidently did in the very first days of the Church? Not only was there a need for deaconesses, but there were also many examples of women who served as well as an

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<sup>14</sup> 1 Timothy 5:13.



existing order of deacons to serve as patterns. Thus certain women were assigned official duties and became known officially as deaconesses. The suggestion was put forward that, on the evidence of the Apostolic Church Order in comparison with the Didascalia, in some cases the deaconesses of the third century, who are really the first official deaconesses for which there is conclusive evidence, were appointed from among the widows. This may not have been so in every case and likely not in other places, but it does not seem unlikely that deaconesses did not constitute an official order until late in the period which we are studying and that their development grew out of the results of the development and defining of the order of widows rather than as a natural outgrowth of the privilege of serving which women had in the earliest days of the Church.

In all of this discussion one must not lose sight of the fact that throughout the period the place of women in the home really receives the chief emphasis. More space may have been devoted to women's religious duties because of the problems involved, but that does not mean that Christianity did little or nothing for the home. Not only were the rights of women protected by the Christian teaching but the love and relationships of the home were elevated to a sacrament. Though Christianity taught subordination of women it did not teach inferiority; rather, women were assigned through subordination a place of honor and responsibility. All the evidence of the period bears testimony to the high place and responsibility of women in the home.

Neither the ascetic trend nor the increased freedom in religious activity are given predominance in the period over the place of honor of women in the home.

This is the evidence concerning the status of women in the life of the Church during the first three centuries and the conclusions which can be based upon it. Many desirable things are lacking in the evidence and wanting in the final picture, but since all the evidence has been presented, one must be content with conclusions that are limited by the evidence. One more question might be asked. In Donaldson's words it is this: "What is the ideal of woman? What could we call the complete development and full blossoming of woman's life?"<sup>15</sup> It is a question which is much agitated today, and it is a question which has presented itself again and again as this study was being made. Fortunately or unfortunately it is not within the scope of this thesis to answer it nor even to decide whether or not the Church in the period under study thought that its conception of the status of women was ideal and included woman's full development. But it is a question which "it is requisite for the historian of woman in any age to put . . . to himself and his readers."<sup>16</sup> Thus we ask it, and with it have presented that on which must be based part of the answer; i.e., the

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<sup>15</sup> Donaldson, Woman, pp. 1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

evidence concerning the status of women in the life of the Church during the first three centuries.

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